鎌池和馬
イラスト
灰村キヨタカ
とある魔術の禁書目録
インデックス
SS
電撃文庫

Toaru Majutsu no Index - SS1

<< CONTENTS >>

- Illustrations
- Toaru Majutsu no Index - SS1
- Prologue: The Calm Before the Start of War.Breakfast.
- Chapter 1: Pot with Meat and the Appetite for Great Tactics. A_Required_Thing.
- Chapter 2: A Dull Gray Alley. Skill_Out.
- Chapter 3: Women’s Dorm of the Anglican Church. Russian_Roulette.
- Chapter 4: A Drunk Mother’s Circumstances. The_Two_Leading_Roles.
- Epilogue: A Single Will and a Small Key. The_Present_Target.
- Afterword
- Credits

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Toaru Majutsu no Index SS

With Kamijou Touma and Fukiyose Seiri's random talk as the beginning, the entire class is going out for hotpot! But Komoe-sensei's greatly troubled!? — [Pot with Meat and the Appetite for Great Tactics]

The stage is London. An emotional day (?) for the the magician girl's turns out to be like this? — [Women's Dorm of the Anglican Church]

What will the future hold for Accelerator, who fell into the dark side of Academy City? — [A Dull Gray Alley]

For what reason did the person who looked like she's molded in the form of the Biri Biri Middle Schooler come to Academy City? — [A Drunk Mother's Circumstances]

This SS volume of [Index] that will touch on them is released!

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Kamachi Kazuma

The book listing below is finally ordered in one line with a"~: ...Well, that's what I wrote, but this 'SS' is considered a different entry, so it's put in two lines.

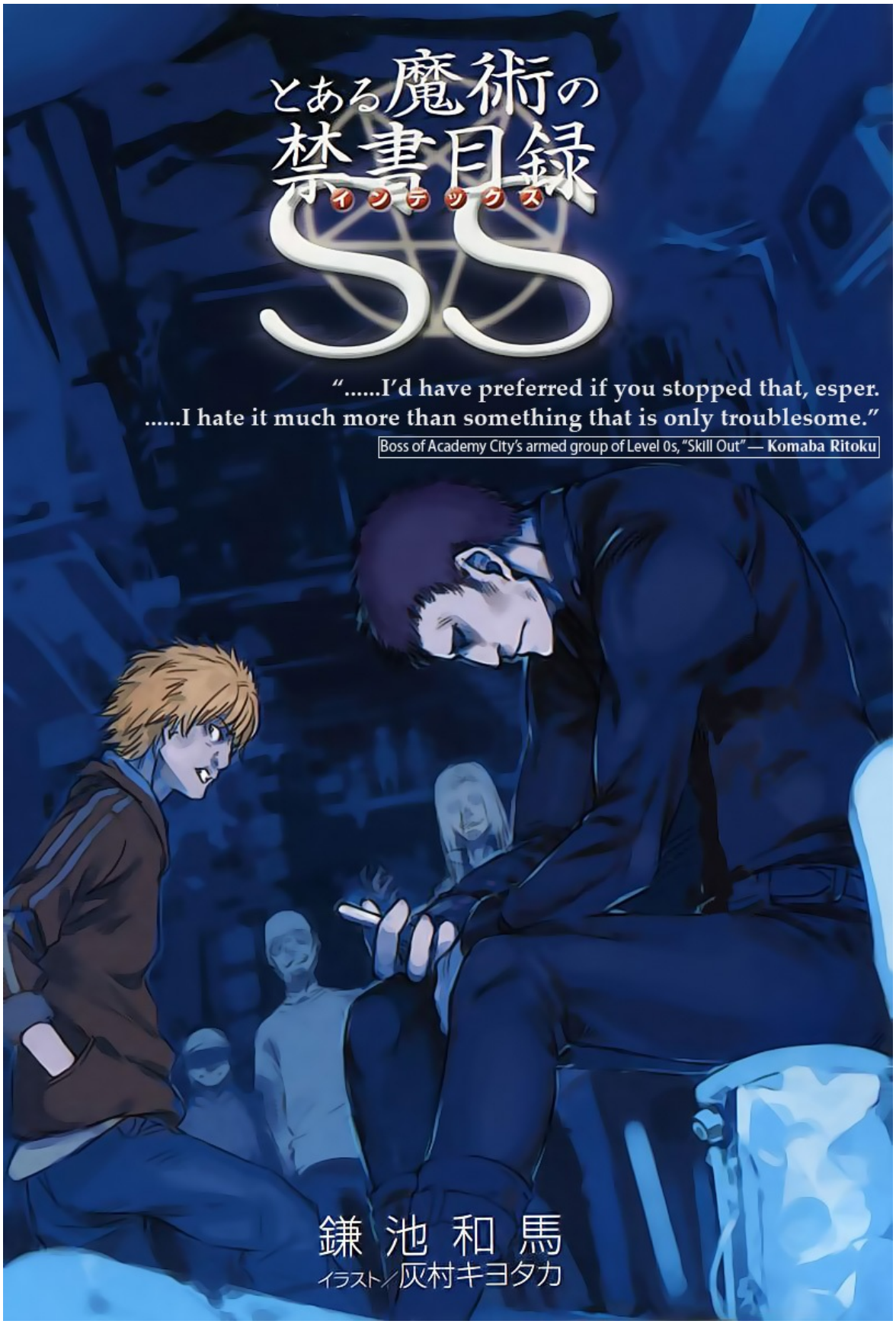
(Products of Dengeki Bunko)

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~13
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

Born in 1972. It's the first time I saw the seiyuus doing a live recording, so while I'm not sure if it's an interesting or a nerve-wrecking one, it's definitely a valuable experience.

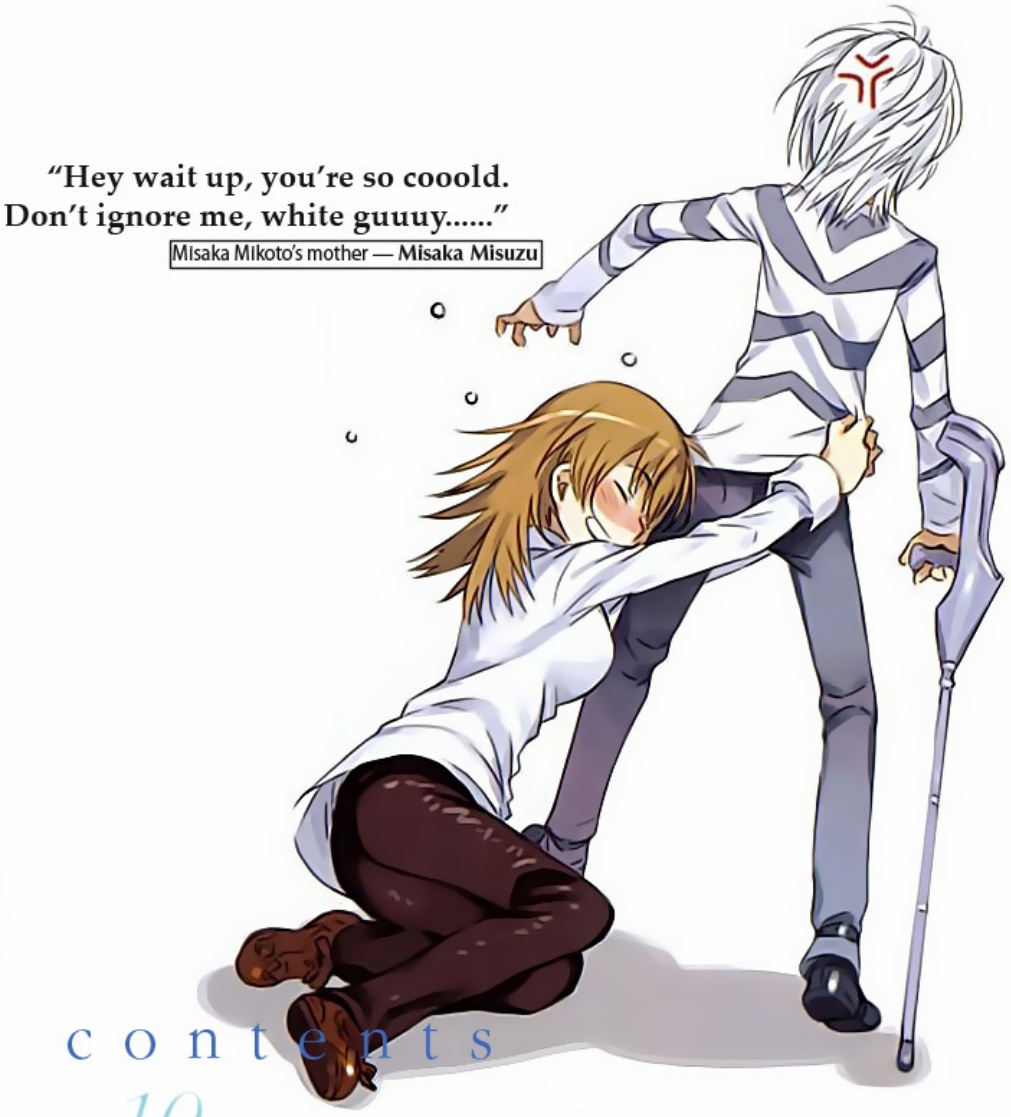
カバー／鶴田創


とある魔術の禁書目録
インデックス
SS
".....I'd have preferred if you stopped that, esper.
.....I hate it much more than something that is only troublesome."
Boss of Academy City's armed group of Level 0s, "Skill Out" — Komaba Ritoku
鎌池和馬
イラスト／灰村キヨタカ

"This meat belongs to me, nyaa!!"
Kamijou's classmate — Tsuchimikado Motoharu
"Hey you, let me do it! When it comes to eggs you have to be fast, like this!"
Kamijou's classmate — Fukiyose Seiri
"Whoa, you're too serious about this!?"
Academy City's Level 0 — Kamijou Touma
"Touma, my stomach is empty!"
Anglican Church nun and keeper of the Index of Prohibited Books — Index
"Haaa... Everybody, please eat quietly ~"
Homeroom teacher of Kamijou's class — Tsukuyomi Komoe

"Looks like I have to tidy things up.
I'll end this in ten minutes."
Academy City's strongest Level 5 — Accelerator

"...The Russian Orthodox Church isn't a collection of perverts... I'm going to kill Vasilisa..."
Magician of the Russian Orthodox Church — Sasha Kreutzev
"I see. The clothing on her is enough to explain it."
Ex-Roman Catholic Church nun — Lucia
"Ssh! That clothing must have an important meaning in the Russian Orthodox Church."
Magician of the Anglican Church's "Necessarius" — Kanzaki Kaori
"Is it a defection?"
Ex-Roman Catholic Church nun — Agnese Sanctis
"Hm? It's not summer, but there seems to be someone here in swimwear."
Magician of the Anglican Church's "Necessarius" — Sherry Cromwell
"How do I put it. She has a fairly unique way of dressing."
Ex-Roman Catholic Church nun — Angelene



contents

10 Prologue The Calm Before the Start of War Breakfast.

14 Chapter 1 Pot with Meat and the Appetite for Great Tactics A_Required_Thing.

46 Chapter 2 A Dull Gray Alley Skill_Out.

112 Chapter 3 Women's Dorm of the Anglican Church Russian_Roulette.

154 Chapter 4 A Drunk Mother's Circumstances The_Two_Leading_Roles.

230 Epilogue A Single Will and a Small Key The_Present_Target.

Toaru Majutsu no Index - SS1

Prologue: The Calm Before the Start of War. *Breakfast.*

There was one tube-shaped kamaboko[1] left over.

"Hmmm..."

In the kitchen, Kamijou Touma let out a groan, as the tube-shaped kamaboko would reach its expiration date at 10 AM today...

Devoting oneself to salad instead of ham was the latest trend. The kamaboko's coloring had shown that it had gone beyond bad, but on the other hand, there was another two or three hours before the expiration date passed.

For students, morning was an important time.

"I can't always be troubled by my luck, but what do I do with this leftover kamaboko?" Kamijou was in a quandary when he looked over from the kitchen to see a calico cat assaulting him by constantly purring. As its winter coat was growing in, it seemed a little bigger.

…

Kamijou, from the kitchen, turned his gaze towards what quietly sat on the bed.

There was a single nun there.

Her name was Index.

Despite the principle of "early to bed, early to rise", she was always lazily idling on top of the bed. Yet this time her back was straight and crisp, her knees were on the floor, and her hands were together as she underwent a quiet prayer this morning.

The calico cat came this way, as if trying not to bother Index.

(Phew...)

Kamijou took the remaining kamaboko in a column and, leaning over the kitchen floor, spoke in a low voice to avoid alerting Index.

"...Do you want to eat this kamaboko?"

"Meoww!" the calico cat let out in a loud voice.

Feeling that his happiness maxed out from the look of the small pet's tail, Kamijou Touma squeezed down on the tube.

The calico cat sank its teeth into the center of the tube, almost like a dog with a bone, before running off from the kitchen once again.

When cats ate their own food, if it exceeded a certain size, they would sneak off and eat in privacy.

It would likely sneak off to underneath the TV or somewhere similar, Kamijou thought appropriately, before going back to making breakfast.

Replacing the calico cat was Index, who came in and started her assault.

"Are we eating kamaboko!?"

"Hah? No, that was the last one!!"

The calico cat stared quietly at the glittering glare of Index's eyes on the kamaboko. Moreover, she was giving off a muddy "How was the calico cat secretly eating without my approval!?"-like feeling. Kamijou quickly stopped her.

She wasn't picky. From foreign food to Japanese food, at that rate, everything in the kitchen would be gone instead of one kamaboko.

"Wait, Index, ten minutes—no, just seven minutes and breakfast will be ready!! So, please don't raid the fridge...!!"

"Kamaboko is kamaboko!!"

"I don't know what you're saying anymore! And what the heck were you praying back there for!? You, Sister-san, whose stomach is never full!!"

Wait, it's only halfway done, so wait!! But Kamijou didn't have time to stop Index, who raced into the kitchen and started moving her mouth.

October 3rd, 7:02 AM.

Kamijou stood, and found himself dumbfounded that, aside from the side dish in one hand, his own share of food had been eaten up, too.

Notes

1. ↑ Also known as fish paste. Wikipedia entry here.

Chapter 1: Pot with Meat and the Appetite for Great Tactics. *A_Required_Thing.*

Part 1

Various things were presented during lunch break.

"Bwah. My stomach is growling like an animal..."

Missing out on breakfast due to various circumstances, Kamijou somehow made it through the morning classes.

As soon as break started, he dashed from the classroom to the cafeteria to make a purchase.

From the hallway, you could hear, "Hey, no running in the hallway…!!" coming from a small teacher. "…if you're going to run, take off your indoor shoes and slide on your socks!!"

"Unfolded socks drift!!" a sports club member's voice mixed in.

What speed! The sports club's way was the Doppler effect.

Even with his average strength, Kamijou would always get a late start.

Always being delayed to lunch break would be fatal, but today was fine. With a bang, he pulled a thin student bag out and placed it on his desk, and from it he pulled out a killer bento box.

"Now, time to eat," he said while pulling off the lid, but the cell phone in his pocket suddenly vibrated by chance.

Checking, he saw that the latest number and email address came from Misaka Mikoto.

"Ah?"

Seeing that, he scratched his head while staring at the LCD screen.

Data is corrupted, this mail cannot be opened appeared.

(What? How did she send mail over here in the first place?)

Kamijou, little by little, pressed the buttons to send a message saying that he couldn't read the mail, and to resend it.

He shoved the phone back in his pocket, as it was time for lunch.

"Mnmn. Today seems weird, somehow."

Getting closer while holding a small bag was Himegami Aisa.

She was a very Japanese-looking girl with long black hair, and would bring a bento every day.

"Again, you've brought something delicious."

"The side dish isn't divided. I'll trade you."

After saying that, Himegami dragged over a chair with a "zuzuzuzuzu" sound.

Kamijou himself pulled open the top of his bento.

"…There was food left over from yesterday, and I had packed a decent breakfast, but…it was eaten this morning by that girl…"

"?"

Kamijou felt faint as Himegami tilted her head to understand.

After lunch break started, the majority of the class disappeared into the hallway to buy food from the cafeteria. The remaining took out their lunches and encamped at some desks, without worrying about space.

Kamijou pulled out the cold barley tea that he had obtained on the way to school (and was lukewarm now) from inside his bag.

"Himegami, you have the drive to make nicely prepared bentos every day. I just pack leftovers and it's tiring to do."

"Once you make a habit of it, you won't have so much trouble."

The difference between their bentos was obvious. Himegami's had vegetable tempura as the staple food, and it wasn't mixed with rice; it looked very tasty.

While Kamijou had merely packed in leftovers, Himegami had planned from the beginning to make her bento. Even worse, because of his way of cooking it, the broth surprisingly had eroded and leaked into the rice's zone.

There was a small look of pity in her eyes while watching him grip the plastic chopsticks.

"This doesn't look like a bento. The broth has unexpectedly, skillfully soaked in."

"...Sore loser?"

"I am not! Today's meal is simmered in broth made from the perfect soft potato; soaking it into the rice was clever! Tch, if you wanna make that kind of face, then try this taro! You'll know Kamijou Touma's underlying strength of using Mirin to kick it up a notch!!"

Then Himegami and Kamijou's chopsticks crossed each other's as they swapped her Pumpkin Tempura.

(What a hassle, frying it in the morning, but it's good; just how early does this person get up?)

Maybe she was a surprisingly hard-worker, Kamijou thought as he put the Tempura in his mouth. It was frustratingly delicious. It should have been a long time since it was put into the Bento box, but it was still crisp. He pleaded with her to teach him the recipe.

On the other hand, Himegami vaguely recalled her learning to cook after her father's work-related transfer left her alone.

While staring at the Taro, she said while chewing, "Hm. Not bad—"

Her words were suddenly cut off with a "Nugh!" and a moan. Like that rounding out the back, she placed her hands on her throat.

Apparently her throat was blocked.

"A-are you okay!?" He reflexively said in a loud voice, but she didn't reply.

With tears in her eyes, she reached for the bottle of mineral water. Kamijou panicked when she grabbed his hand and pulled it to her back.

"Eh, what? I'd better pat you on the back?!" he cried, as Himegami was nodding with water in her mouth.

Touma moved her long hair to expose her back, while deciding to gently rub her back up and down, as she painfully shivered in her seat.

"Damn!! I should take you the infirmary—!"

"Mugu! Mugugu!"

"Oh, you want me to do it harder!?"

As she pointed at her back with his hand, she nodded little by little. Kamijou, who wanted to help her as soon as possible, lost himself in her instructions and patted her back, when suddenly, a snap was heard.

The irregular feeling of her bra unhooking could be felt on his fingers.

To that, she silently molded her hand into a fist, and mercilessly drove it into his stomach (Her breasts shaking upwards slightly).

Zudom!! It was as if his stomach was making that sound as his body flew backwards, rolling on the floor. Himegami held her chest area as she ran to the bathroom.

"Guagh. I–I just did it like she said to do it. What were those unpleasant eyes for…?" Kamijou was on the ground, shaking little by little from his core when a classmate with long brows, long black hair, and huge breasts named Fukiyose Seiri came in while holding a Side Bread Plastic bag in one hand. It seemed she had gone to her locker to get the food she had there.

In an amazed voice, she said, "What are you doing?"

"Fu–Fukiyose?"

He slowly got up and sat in a chair while looking at her lunch.

"Why are you always eating that sort of horrible bread?"

"It's not horrible! It's perfectly delicious!!"

She shouted shamelessly while holding a bundle of the bread with the wrapper that said "Carries 21 nutrients to increase the brain's capacity." It was like medicine for lunch.

Frowning, Fukiyose sat at Kamijou's desk while she bit into and guzzled down the bread, which still didn’t look appetizing.

"If you don't have any side dishes, you can have my taro."

"I'll tell you now: today I'm wearing a front hook."

"?"

Not understanding the reason for that outburst, he tilted his head in confusion. While she watched him in that state, she cleared her throat.

"Still, it's rare for you to make a bento."

"Earlier, Himegami said the same thing. Even I find it unusual."

Kamijou once again started poking at the bento with his chopsticks, while the rest of his classmates, who had gone to buy side dish bread at the last moment, began returning to the classroom in groups with it in one hand. It seemed the cafeteria would be set a little later. Now that the ban had been lifted, the season’s trend seemed to have been about going outside the school to buy things like Oden at convenience stores. That was how students passed their lunch break.

After eating, they rolled up a handout flier to play catch with, and others pulled out their cell phones to watch a variety show while eating. But there was one topic that everyone was discussing. .As if listening to them aimlessly, the same thing came out of Fukiyose mouth.

"…War, is it?"

She sighed as those dangerous words came out, and Kamijou unintentionally stopped his chopsticks.

Fukiyose, while hiding a frown on her face from his visage, said, "What, you don't know? Try checking the news a little more."

"I know. I really do."

Rather, he knew better than anyone. Still, he could never tell her that.

"Well, at least you know about that. Some fighting from sects of a religious group somewhere has caused a worldwide movement of protests."

The degree of that second-hand story Fukiyose had heard somewhere was a bit unreliable.

"Maybe I'll go."

Her tone held a sense of anxiety and fear in those words. Kamijou's face went dim. He stopped noticing his chopsticks and she let out a sigh before continuing.

"But if war started, the price of things—such as meat and vegetables—would rise. So would the usual oil."

Those sudden, out-of-place words confused Kamijou a little.

However, there were rumors about it circling around as well.

The sports club group, who were watching TV on their cell phones, said, "They've placed tighter restrictions on the exits, so the story is that there won't be any more school field trips."

"Really!? Ichihanaransai will still be affected!!"

Other things were said by girls next to them.

"But earlier in the staff room, I heard from the Anti-Skill teachers that because of the counter-plan, the midterm test got lost."

"Lucky~!! I wasn't confident in the body inspection, so this saved me!!"

"Excuse me? I've been training extra hard to outdo everyone at bending a spoon with one hand; what am I supposed to do now?"

And they all laughed.

This school...or rather, this entire city was filled with the current "War causes big problems" issues.

Academy City and the Roman Catholic Church disputes happen; even if they knew that, they were so cemented into their positions that they couldn’t even imagine it.

(So good,) Kamijou thought.

So that such an environment where one could imagine such a blood drenched battle, was at an end.

So that it didn’t happen, Kamijou Touma took action.

"Why've you been quiet for so long?"

"N-no-nothing!"

"…Stop looking at other people's breasts when they're talking. Geez, what were you imagining?"

"I'm not imagining anything like that! Once in a while I have to shoulder serious things!!"

In a fit of irritation, he thrust his chopstick into the taro in the bento box.

"But, why would meat and vegetables be so expensive? Academy City clones meat and has artificial vegetables. Look, there are agricultural buildings everywhere. Even District 17, which is famed as the industrial area."

"Besides, isn't there a limit? There's no such thing as complete self-sufficiency—from working with partner organizations, you can just take it from somewhere else!"

"Hmph."

Kamijou saw that Himegami had just returned to the classroom at a glance from the corner of his eye.

"Then, I wonder if it's better to get Nabe now. After the price rises, you can't help but think it is a good value."

"Well, there's a reason. The prices in the supermarket rise bit by bit during the winter. It's still early, but I better buy Nabe quickly."

And after those words, he could hear Aogami Pierce and Tsuchimikado Motoharu near the blackboard in a deep discussion.

"Like I said, the lap pillow doesn't really exist. That was only a product of fiction!"

"…No, it does, nya~."

They stopped their conversation and looked over to Kamijou. Aogami Pierce said, "So Kami-yan, do you want to go out for Nabe today?"

Tsuchimikado followed up, "Nya. If it's Sukiyaki, I know a cheap but delicious shop."

That conversation spread to the neighboring student.

"It's October and too soon for Nabe. Right?"

The circle of the conversation expanded from there at once.

His classmates got closer, one-by-one.

"What? You guys aren't going to the store somewhere today?"

"We won't allow you to have a monopoly of the delicious shops."

"I prefer Nabe to Yakiniku, personally."

"Wait, wait, everyone pull out your cash. We'll let the majority decide where we go."

"Huh," Kamijou's eye spotted it.

The subject of the conversation went from "I'll eat nabe" to "Go out to eat with everyone in class."

"Why did it suddenly go to nabe again?"

"The launch of this was the Daihaseisai some time ago."

"This feels like preparations for the Ichihanaransai, doesn't it?"

The group surrounding Kamijou exchanged a variety of suggestions, until he finally said "Never mind the reason! Just Nabe will be fine!!" to change the direction. But Kamijou, who was at the center of the conversation, was left alone.

"Majority voting!!"

"Sukiyaki!!"

"BBQ!!"

"Oden!" "I want oden too!!"

"Who was using ventriloquism?"

"Sha—bu—sha—bu— (x 6)"

"5.1 channel surround sound!? Someone raise the sound!!"

Then the whole classroom became like a stadium with an explosion of loud noise.

In the end, Tsuchimikado screamed out "This Tsuchimikado-style hidden store can meet all of your needs nya~!"

Aogami Pierce countered with "Hop by my place where there's waitresses! There's one with huge tits and the smile of an angel with no boyfriend!"

An uproar of, "No, I want cheerleader uniform waitresses!"

"I've seen it, it's more like tennis-wear."

The debate was moving on to a point where it wasn't understandable.

Kamijou let out a nervous "Gyaa."

"Fukiyose-san, what should we do about this difficult thing!?"

"Geez…"

Fukiyose took a short breath, hid her face with both hands, and then raised them both behind her head at once, sweeping her back hair behind her ears perfectly. After that, she fixed her hair clips.

She was serious.

Kamijou let out a small cry reflexively.

"—Fukiyose forehead deluxe!!?"

"Now!! I'll take care of the voting quickly and quietly!!"

Fukiyose went to the podium and cleanly cleared the blackboard.

Part 2

The female teacher with the appearance of a twelve-year-old, Tsukuyomi Komoe, and the female gym teacher with enormous breasts and who wore a jersey all year long, Yomikawa Aiho, were walking along the corridor. Lunch break would be over soon.

"So they say that a neko-chan's brain is roughly the same as 1½-year-old human's. Academy City's curriculum begins at 5-years-old at the earliest: this conclusion was drawn from the neko-chan's being unable to use abilities… This was the basis of Isoshio-san's thesis from the Kirigaoka Female College, but—"

"Seems like a lie to me. How would you even know if a stupid animal's ability manifested itself? Well, the irregular ability development is the gimmick of that place. It wouldn't be strange if various ideas like that came flying out of the place."

Yomikawa halfheartedly swung around her bundled black hair, while she said, "Kirigaoka is where that runaway girl under your care is from, right? What's up with her?"

"Tee-hee. When Himegami-chan enrolled in the school dorms, it was a little lonely, but since Musujime-chan came, it's fine now. She must've had a bad experience over there, but Sensei will wait for her to tell me. Because it's different from doing housework, she can study better now."

"Oh really?" Yomikawa let out an admiring, honest tone.

"My freeloader heartlessly left rather quickly. He didn't even leave a note. I get the impression it had something to with the scrap of paper I found this morning from Nagatenjouki Academy. Seems like he got into the dorms over there."

"Eh! They are said to be the number one when it comes to ability development! Look at this year's Daihaseisai festival, they even beat Tokiwadai Middle School and became the champions."

"Maybe, but still. Somehow, it doesn't make sense; for other freeloaders to go

where yours left from seems unnatural... well, there are various things over here, too."

Be it an argument or whatever else, each one respectively took charge as Komoe-sensei and Yomikawa's classes were next door to each other.

They may have been the same class grade, but the atmosphere—or so to speak, the "color" of the classes—was different. Yomikawa's way of ending lunch break was to gather up the next history book and the like about five minutes before the end, and use the remaining time to show each other homework assignments. Her being in charge of gym had nothing to do with history. It was said that the history teachers were crying in their minds from happiness.

Komoe-sensei's class on the other hand…

"It's settled!! Everyone's going out for Sukiyaki tonight!!!"

"Doooh!" Like after lost time in a goal in a soccer stadium had been decided, a cheer could be heard. That loud cheer toppled Komoe-sensei. Even the glass windows in the hallway were shaking from it.

Komoe-sensei struggled to get up.

"Waaaah! Yo-Yomikawa-sensei, I tried to take control of the class earlier, but I'm sorry—!!"

Komoe-sensei jumped into her classroom, all shook up with anger.

Looking at her back, Yomikawa sighed and felt dizzy.

"It's fine. It looks like it's just a stupid issue…"

Part 3

Various things led tonight's dinner being Sukiyaki.

The party that consisted of the entire class, Index, Komoe-Sensei, and Sphinx walked to the nabe shop that Tsuchimikado knew. Since the start of the Daihaseisai, Index had already barged into the class five times and had become familiar with them, so there was no need to explain to others anymore.

Since it was past the time to go home, no buses or trains were running. So it was decided they would walk to the store in District 7.

There was a complicated corner inside the underground shopping complex, which had various experimental school cuisines and nutrition shops. Thinking that Tsuchimikado's stepsister's home economics school's shop must be there as well, Kamijou silently sighed.

As they entered the passage to the sukiyaki shop…

"Uwah.."

Kamijou unintentionally let out a moan.

Maybe it was because every store in that underground mall was built around a modern design, but the sukiyaki shop looked uncannily run-down. A wreck, to be more familiar. There was no sense of it trying to attract customers.

"You wouldn't expect this place to be surprisingly good, but the stubborn old boss won't paint it."

"On the contrary, because it looks so rundown, wouldn't it serve as good cover?"

Attempting to gain confidence by taking a deep breath, Kamijou was in the front row as they pulled open the door with a rattle.

They only found an unmotivated-looking student clerk near the cash register, but from the interior of Kamijou's group, whose total count was forty people, heard an exchange, with thick provincial accents.

"Whoa—!! We've got a big catch!! The sales from today alone will top the charts," an exposed voice said in a flurry.

Kamijou's shoulders dropped. "Well, they don't seem to be organized."

"In the first place, it's strange for forty people to come without calling ahead. I wanted to see that guy's smiling face instead of his boring empty one, nya," Tsuchimikado said. In the middle of it,

"By the way," Komoe-sensei interrupted. She was leaning on the wall while viewing a somewhat, seemingly oil-stained catalog. "Tsuchimikado-chan, this shop has thirty kinds of beers, and that's only the local brews. Also, their alcohol is top-notch. How did you come to know about such a place?"

"Guh!? N–No!! It's unthinkable, nya!! How could a high school senior even drink alcohol, nya!!"

"Tsuchimikado-chan? Tsuchimikado-chaaan?"

Komoe-sensei's infinitely shady eyes pointed at him until the long awaited nabe finally arrived. Touma's classmates grabbed her whole body while saying "Now-now-now" and forcibly took her to the banquet hall for the group.

Sensei tried to say something, but they seemed to ignore her.

Naturally, having one table of nabe for forty people to peck at would be impossible to do, so it was decided to split off into different groups and tables.

"Let's eat!" "Let's eat some nabe!" Everyone's tension rose; some twisted the knobs on the gas-range on the tables for no reason, while others kept busy with a contest on who could cleanly divide the wooden chopsticks.

The calico cat's little nose began twitching in delight as it meowed while watching, as it was banned once again from sukiyaki that had negi[1] in it.

Pitying it, Kamijou had lumped in an order of onigiri earlier with the nabe, and placed it in front of the calico cat. "Curses!! Everyone gets meat while I only get salmon," the calico cat seemingly pouted while raising its tail, as it grabbed both sides of the onigiri with its front paws and nibbled on it in jealousy.

While waiting for the order of nabe, the class began talking on the topic of the chaos on the "outside" of Academy City.

Himegami, in a whispering voice, was talking to Fukiyose while back-to-back.

"Come to think of it, apparently there is talk that children with higher abilities should submit papers ascertaining their identities."

"If you're talking about stronger esper abilities, it's a proper way to handle them, isn't it? Humph, as I thought, if it becomes very bad we might be the ones paying the dearest price!"

On the contrary, sitting next to Fukiyose, Touma pondered about it quietly. Nearby, Index tilted her head in confusion.

As seen by the relationship between Misaka Imouto and Misaka Mikoto, ability could be determined by DNA information. Truthfully, they wouldn't want to lose students with valuable skills. Especially Level 5 espers alone, who had been worth enough to make a professional laboratory.

In a related topic…

"Hey, is it true Tokiwadai Middle School's buses are bulletproof and explosion-proof? Rumors like that have suddenly popped up; I'm worried."

"Nya. Gossip like that being whispered on the School Garden reeks of lies. Information there is highly classified, so I doubt it'd be leaked without reason."

Sitting across from Kamijou was Aogami Pierce, who had left to use the telephone and came back during Tsuchimikado's speech, felt it was ridiculous but had a strange credibility.

For example, if the Ojou-samas of Tokiwadai Middle School were lost, it would without doubt be a major blow to the financial and political worlds. People's lives weren't all worth the same, Kamijou sighed.

"Haa! The number of parents making inquiries that say "If war breaks out, Academy City will be dangerous for their children" has multiplied."

"Eh, such conversations are being raised as well?"

Komoe-sensei spoke in a small, tired tone, while Kamijou was puzzled. She was sitting across the table from him and waiting for the nabe to come with a glass of

cold water at her mouth.

"Well, getting their children may be important. But I can also understand… where is there another place safer than Academy City? Whether inside or outside the country, I don't think any other security measures are enough."

Doubting it, Kamijou made a bitter smile. He couldn't even count how many times he had been sent to the hospital in the last few months.

Sitting next to Touma was Index.

"Touma, I'm hungry."

"…The nabe will come soon. But you really go at your own pace."

"I want an Onigiri, too."

"Forget it! That's for the cat!"

Kamijou's shout made the calico cat's fur stand on end. "Gimme a break! I can't eat meat and now you want to take the salmon away from me?" in a menacing purring voice.

And then…

"Here comes the Nabe"

Tsuchimikado cried out in a liar's voice.

Kamijou's group noticed several employees were bringing a large black pot with both hands. There was already a low simmering sound coming from the pot, just as Tsuchimikado said, a scent that couldn't come from one made from drifted through the air.

"Let's see" Kamijou said as he peered into the pot the employee brought.

He was suddenly captured by his classmates surrounding him, Index let out a small shriek, and Fukiyose sighed with a gloomy look on her face.

"Gwah!? What are you bastards doing!!?"

"Fool!! If you keep that up you'll overturn the nabe!"

"So suddenly! Look especially at that cute face and huge rack on that employee are ultra-dangerous!!"

"With your luck, we'll probably starve once you make a mistake!"

He would like to argue, but he was outnumbered. The Imagine Breaker that dwelled in his right hand would have no effect on his starving classmates.

Perhaps because of that specific event, misfortune failed to happen this time around, without warning.

Except for that store clerk, the cute one with the big boobies. She more or less caught Kamijou red-handed, and said "Is-is everything alright?"; which had his classmates think he was screwed, after all…

"…If his bad luck doesn't butt in now at least, I'll get really, really mad"

"Don't poker-face when you say stuff like that, it's scary!"

There was much waving and flailing of arms on Kamijou's part as he cried that out, but the class's attention was all on the nabe.

He pulled himself back together and picked the raw eggs for the sukiyaki, banging them on the corner of the table, cracking the shells open and dropping the contents inside a bowl.

A clatter of chopsticks could be heard as he beat the eggs, but then Fukiyose, who was sitting nearby suddenly voiced, with great discontent, "…Damn you, Kamijou. Whatever the hell is taking you so long to scramble those eggs?"

"Eh?"

"Gaah I'm already irritated just by looking at you!! Let me have that for a bit, when it comes to eggs you have to do it fast! Look, you do it just like this!!"

"Hiii, a direct controller!?"

Kamijou, with his rice bowl taken away, nonchalantly distanced his chopsticks

from Fukiyose. At that rate it was likely only vegetables would be heaping on the long-awaited sukiyaki.

Meanwhile, Aogami Pierce, as if he totally read what was happening, kept a safety zone with a fixed distance from Fukiyose, then nonchalantly called out to Kamijou.

"When we limit ourselves to the menu, the prices still haven't changed, no?"

"Y-yeah. But we're probably on the stocking-up phase. We're waiting and seeing whether or not this is temporary, but the truth is there definitely might be an immediate price hike."

"In other words, we have to eat these at once! Yahoo—!!"

"'Yahoo—' my ass, you meat-only-picking bitch! And Fukiyose-san is somehow a carnivorous bastard who's like a black bass destroying the nabe's contents—!!"

Undeterred, Kamijou reached in with his chopsticks, but in no time at all, to see broth-soaked shirataki when he thought it was meat with only tiny scraps of it remaining when he grabbed them, was painful. And to make matters worse, he unreasonably got a fist from Fukiyose for saying 'stop churning up the pot with chopsticks; you're destroying the tofu'.

Nevertheless, no matter what one said, everyone was having fun partaking from the pot. Or rather, why he himself didn't get much from the pot, Kamijou puzzled over, but then…

"Ha!? Oh yeah… Index's gastric problem is—!?"

Way faster than him realizing his concerns, the white-habited girl's eyes sparkled.

He felt an unexpected, unpleasant premonition.

Part 4

For adolescent high school students, only nabe sets were insufficient, so until additional orders arrived at their tables, everyone was doing his or her own thing. The majority of the class was screaming *gyaa! gyaa!* noises inside the store, but Kamijou went out and was resting for a bit. One might say, as they were in the underground mall, there was not much of a feeling of being outside.

(War, eh…)

(An unreal word—no, it'd be better as an unreal word,) Kamijou suddenly reminded himself.

In the underground mall, oriented for college students, people a little older than Kamijou were walking back and forth. And everyone was pleasantly smiling. That was itself peace. It was everywhere in the townscape. And it seemed to diminish the credibility of the word 'war'.

Even so, scars certainly remained.

With the turmoil on September 30th, several buildings in a street block were mowed down, and the outer sections of Academy City took a land-transforming scale of a bombing. Those kinds of scars wouldn't go away in a day or two.

After this, 'that' would probably occur around the world.

There was no definite promise that world-shattering event would definitely not occur.

The Roman Catholic Church.

And the God's Right Seat.

(...Seems I have to do something.)

He didn't know what he could definitely do. In the first place, he had a feeling that he would be doing more than what a mere high school student could do.

However, Vento of the Front, who had arrived in this town the other day, said, *"—I've attacked Academy City to eliminate Kamijou Touma."*

Kamijou was not in the middle of a large flow.

The large flow was happening with Kamijou as the center.

(I dunno what's what, but if so, even I can probably do something; I'm not a spectator here. I dunno who decided this, but if I'm the axis of the story, is there no room left where I can change the flow of the events?)

Even with the long-awaited pot, the more he thought about it, the more he was feeling depressed. With his mood changing, Kamijou took out his cell phone and opened it, unaware that he had mail.

It came from Misaka Mikoto.

(The usual from lunchtime eh,) he thought as he tried to open the mail, but even as he opened the inbox, the message [no new mail] was being displayed. Somehow, her address was treated as spam and was automatically segregated into a different folder, but even as he punched his way into it, that spam folder couldn't be found at all. That function wasn't used much, so he had no idea.

"?? …What was that?"

He tilted his head and figured he'd deal with it later, so he put his cell phone back into his pocket.

"Kami-yan."

A voice reached Kamijou's back.

Turning around, Tsuchimikado Motoharu was standing there.

He was holding a small fifteen centimeter metallic bottle in one hand. Its contents might have been whiskey. He had probably come there to secretly drink it and keep it from Komoe-sensei.

Tsuchimikado's appearance was totally normal. Without even a single plaster. However that lad had probably risked his life in battle; looking closely, his gait was suspiciously awkward.

As usual, the self-styled spy Tsuchimikado could see that from looking at an amateur like Kamijou the latter was suspecting [awkward]. As expected, his was no minor injury.

Tsuchimikado probably knew why Kamijou was secretly excluding himself from the class.

He smiled as he said, "…You're mistaken if you think the war that will occur from here on is all your fault. Thanks to you, everyone in the class is not dragged in. You were able to protect those around you. And so you experiencing feelings of alienation is too unreasonable."

"…I see."

"That's right. The war occurred because someone behind the scenes blundered. For an amateur like Kami-yan, to be angry that it's the fault of someone somewhere else is enough."

On hearing that, Kamijou instinctively smiled.

After all, both Kamijou and Tsuchimikado were really similar, burdening themselves with their own baggage.

Tsuchimikado said, "It's starting."

"Yeah."

"The scale of the war is changing. This is totally beyond a mere brats' squabble. You better be on the lookout, Kami-yan. From the way it is now, it might be difficult to escape situations from here on."

"…I get your point."

Kamijou slightly glanced downwards.

Onto his own flexing right hand.

"Even I didn't think this would end up good. It's because that rather than 'something is insufficient', there are many with their own insufficiencies. What happened up to this point is miraculous. Perhaps, if they were rightly recognized, I wouldn't have advanced to this fate."

"The other side won't be waiting leisurely for our preparations."

"That might be the case. Even so, I know what I must do. No matter how small, I'll have no choice but to learn it in detail."

Having said that, Kamijou shifted his gaze up.

"It's no use complaining over the insufficiency. We'll be advancing little by little. It's a difficult problem even in the best of cases. But if we don't do it, we can never get close to our intended people."

"Kami-yan…"

Tsuchimikado tried to say something, but held it in.

He was a professional spy, different from Kamijou. A person who knew the darkness of the world far better than Kamijou. The hesitation had disappeared from Kamijou's tone, which caused Tsuchimikado to fumble for the right words.

"I've depended on others until now. And I've left it all to others for the world I don't know myself. I believe even I burdened you with troubles. These will be no more from now on. I have to walk on my own to the new world I haven't seen up to now!"

Kamijou had gotten the attention of Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

He silently clenched the Imagine Breaker, his right hand.

"Tsuchimikado, I've decided."

In a voice filled with a strong will, he clearly said it.

In a sense, to the senior of that business.

"That's right, from now on I'll study English!!!"

.....

"Hah?"

Aware that Tsuchimikado was reflexively and completely agape, Kamijou brought out his cell phone from his pants.

"Now look, Tsuchimikado! I've downloaded a mobile app called Easy English Training! I'm onto Level 3 of daily conversations, but as I thought, it's tough. But I have to reasonably remember non-Japanese words, so the Roman Catholic Church and God's Right Seat are not always limited to always talking in our language!!"

"Errr…"

Stepping too far back, Tsuchimikado's unintentional expression was like he was talking to someone for the first time.

"Why English for this situation?"

"Eh? If they're in Rome then Italian will do. However, there are two billion of them. For that, English will do."

Kamijou's puzzling answer came back.

For something like a definite way to survive, that was the last thing on Tsuchimikado's mind.

It seemed that Kamijou was somehow hell-bent on beating words into two billion opponents.

"Well, I was thinking that words won't go through, but if the soul is sent along, one would expect that they should understand, I think. There's no reason why everyone should be fluent in Japanese like Lidvia or Biagio. Or rather, everyone is talking to one another in Japanese, but we shouldn't be too dependent on that. Hence that's my reason."

"—"

A thick *BAM!!* sound resounded in the underground mall.

Because of the extreme stupidity, Tsuchimikado almost reflexively unleashed his fist.

Tsuchimikado exasperatedly shook his head, ignored the lad rolling nearby, and went back inside the sukiyaki restaurant as he lowered his shoulders.

Afterwards, it went without saying that Kamijou Touma was unable to get even a bit of the additional pile of meat.

Notes

1. ↑ Negi is a type of green onion and onions can cause anemia in cats, along with liver damage.

Chapter 2: A Dull Gray Alley. *Skill_Out.*

Part 1

It was early morning the same day, October 3rd.

However, Accelerator was in a rectangular underground area surrounded by thick concrete, so he couldn't tell if it was morning or night. And it didn't really matter. He was standing with his cane underneath fluorescent lights that gave off uniform illumination.

He was in a shooting range.

The room went about 50 meters back, but only the front 10 meters were made for people to walk in. The rest was cut off by an oblong table. There were a great number of human-shaped targets beyond the table and a training program could freely move them anywhere along a mesh-like series of metal rails.

There were a number of thin dividers on the oblong table creating 13 lanes for the shooting area. The space for each lane was about the size of a phone booth.

Accelerator was standing near the middle at the 8th lane.

His slender hand was gripping a small handgun and the area smelled a bit like fireworks.

"Exercise Number 42. Begin."

A recorded woman's voice gave that announcement as 5 targets began to move.

(I'll go in order from closest to farthest. I just have to blow them away one at a

time.)

Accelerator held the handgun in one hand and accurately shot each target.

Gunshots rang out in the large underground area. The loud noise bounced back adding even more pressure to his eardrums.

Accelerator was right-handed, but he was forced to shoot with his left hand because of his cane.

“Exercise Number 43. Begin.”

He only needed about 70 seconds per round.

(I can’t focus too much on the sight. I have to watch everything. Even the motions at the edge of my vision.)

As he thought, Accelerator was intent on his shooting. For him, reloading was more of an issue than the firing itself. As he had his cane in his right hand, he had to do so with only his left hand.

He removed the magazine, spun the gun around so the slot for the magazine was pointed up while his pointer finger remained on the trigger, pulled a magazine from his left sleeve with his mouth, put it in the gun, spun the gun halfway back around, put the slide in his mouth, and pulled it back.

It all took about 2 seconds.

But Accelerator felt that was too slow.

“Exercise Number 44. Begin.”

He had tried firing plenty of other guns.

(I have to choose a gun based on the speed with which I can reload, the weight when I’m swinging it around in one hand, and the recoil when I fire it.)

The table in front of the lane had military, self-defense-use, sports-use, and plenty of other types of handguns on it. It also had shotguns, submachine guns, and rifles.

There were empty cartridges scattered about his feet like a pile of fallen leaves. Because of the various types of guns, the shells had different sizes and shapes. Some were copper-colored metal and some were made of blue plastic.

“Exercise Number 45. Begin.”

He shot the targets moving at high speed on the rails.

(Don’t rely on the destructive force of a single shot. Shooting multiple times with an easy-to-shoot bullet works best as a generic strategy.)

The targets picked up pace and they could turn sudden, sharp corners at the numerous switching points, but he precisely hit every single one regardless.

Members of Anti-Skill underwent formal training and even they couldn’t do that. He had just barely started using guns and his posture was unsteady because of his cane, but he could already handle a gun like he’d been doing it for years.

But…

“…I can’t use this.” Accelerator said in an annoyed voice before the machine output his stats which were a personal record.

He pushed a few buttons on a calculator-like device on the lane’s table and the training program stopped. He then threw the handgun onto the table.

He spoke without turning around.

“What do you want, you disguised bastard.”

After he spoke, a purposeful sounding footstep could be heard from behind him. It was most likely in place of a knock.

“I was trying to suppress my presence, but it seems I need to practice some more,” spoke a soft male voice.

Accelerator turned around to find a thin brown-haired boy standing there. Accelerator recalled that his name was Unabara Mitsuki. But just after naming himself, the boy had said that his face and name were both fake.

“I’d actually like to consult with you on that matter. You were in the middle of target practice, so it couldn’t have been that I made a noise. So how did you detect my presence?”

“You’re always blabbering about something, aren’t you? I’m not gonna help you with that.” Accelerator spat out, but he honestly hadn’t noticed Unabara Mitsuki’s approach.

At least not with any of his normal sensory organs.

But…

(Tch. They’re trembling again…)

The hand that had held the handgun was hurting for a reason other than fatigue.

He didn’t know why, but this had been happening ever since he had first met the guy a few days ago. Whenever Unabara Mitsuki was nearby, his fingertips would tremble unconsciously. And he would feel a pressure on his chest like there was a basketball there.

One thing always came to his mind when it happened.

(Kihara Amata.)

The pouring rain, a dull pain, and the iron-like taste and smell of blood.

(Last Order.)

That small life that had been tormented by unreasonable violence and seemed like it could slip away even now.

And…

(…Those black wings that appeared on my back.)

It was nothing more than a vague, abstract image in his head. He had only started to become aware of that existence when he had joined Group…no, it had actually been from the point when he had crushed the researcher known as Kihara Amata.

But he couldn’t exactly discuss that with the man before him.

He would gain nothing from showing any weakness here.

“I asked what you wanted.”

“Have you decided on a weapon?” Unabara’s smile did not go away. “You won’t have time to do too close an examination. You have an urgent job to do. You need to learn how things work around here as soon as you can.”

“So far, nothing’s felt just right,” Accelerator spat out and looked down at the large number of guns on top of the table. “But somehow I doubt I’d find one that did if I checked every gun in the world.”

“How about you put together a list of equipment you can use along with your powers?”

“You just don’t fucking get it, do you?”

He tapped the choker-style electrode on his neck.

“I can’t rely on this thing.”

“Why not? It’s been improved, right? The report from Group’s technical team said that the time you can use your powers was upped from 15 minutes to 30.”

“Group…” Accelerator repeated as if he didn’t care.

On September 30th, some people in powered suits had appeared after he had pulverized Kihara Amata and taken him away to join a unit by that name, but even a formal member like him didn’t know the details. Currently, it seemed Group acted as a 4-member set including him. But he didn’t even know how many other such units there were or even if there were any others. The people in those powered suits may have been members of a different “Group”.

He had transferred to Nagatenjouki Academy.

That was what Yomikawa Aiho and Yoshikawa Kikyou had been told happened. Even Accelerator thought that was a nice method of explaining it. It was true that no one would find it odd that the top school in Academy City had a special

class that stressed secrecy. There could very well be a single research room that even the other students didn't know about.

Taking advantage of that, he was registered as a student there, but didn't actually attend the school.

(It's the people who control Group. I can't see the whole picture, but the people above us must have the power to do that and a goal that requires that they go to that much effort. Sounds suspicious to me.)

Accelerator knew there were a number of subordinate organizations that worked under Group. They developed and maintained equipment, transported personnel, and completely destroyed all evidence of Group's actions. A huge number of people must be needed to do all those various jobs and *it was all for the sake of just four people*.

One of the recipients of all that, Unabara Mitsuki, had a look of puzzlement on his face.

"Are you displeased with how the electrode is tuned?"

"Ha. Doesn't matter if it's 30 minutes or 3 days, it's still fundamentally the same. If something fucks up, it's all over. If the electrode breaks down, I can't fight and then I'm dead."

These were his feelings after facing a formidable opponent like Kihara Amata with the battery having died. He could no longer feel safe while he was relying on something.

From now on, he had to fight no matter what situation he was driven into.

"Ha ha. So you're saying all the effort the technical team went to in analyzing the electrode was a complete waste?"

"I don't fucking care," Accelerator responded. "Is that all you wanted?"

"No, I was about to get to why I'm here."

Unabara paused for a beat and continued.

“Group has gotten an order for a job from the board of directors.”

“…”

“Academy City is currently fortifying its anti-Roman Catholic battle lines, but due to the focus on anti-Roman Catholic things the defense on the inside has gotten thinner. Our job is to do a clean sweep of a force that is going to use that gap in the defenses to do some damage to the functionality of Academy City.”

“Heh. Ha ha ha.”

Accelerator laughed without meaning to after hearing that.

“So I’ve fallen so damn far that I have a collar around my neck and have to be ordered to take out the trash? Life really is full of surprises.”

His red eyes turned to lines in enjoyment and his lips became a shape of scorn.

“I was told I had to make up for what that fucker Kihara did, but I never thought I’d be doing boring shit like this! Ha ha. I guess the higher ups see me as the same kind of trash Kihara was!!”

“You brought it on yourself. No one made you fall this far.”

In response to those words, Accelerator stretched out his slender arm and grabbed Unabara by the collar. He purposefully aimed for the very center of his chest.

He grabbed Unabara with those fingertips that could alter various vectors. He could even reverse the flow of Unabara’s blood with them.

“Listen up, kid. There’s something you need to learn.” Accelerator’s expression did not change as he pulled on Unabara’s shirt. “A human life is a fragile thing. I can destroy one with a touch of my finger. So watch yourself. If you don’t, I might break something you’d rather I didn’t.”

“I’ll be careful.”

But Unabara’s words did not match the smooth tone of his voice and there was a calm smile on his face.

“Tch,” Accelerator lightly clicked his tongue and let go of Unabara’s shirt.

“May I continue?”

“Go ahead.”

“The target is **Skill-Out**. You probably know more about them than me.”

Accelerator frowned at Unabara’s words.

Simply put, Skill-Out was an armed group of Level 0s.

One’s status in Academy City was decided by academics and powers. Being a Level 0 was like living your school life with a test you got a 0 on hanging from your neck and it seemed some people couldn’t stand to be treated like that.

Potentially, there were around 10,000 Skill-Out members in Academy City. Most of those were people who rented out a dorm but never went to school and people who went to school but acted as Skill-Out members at night. The Skill-Out members that never returned to the dorms and gave them the image of an armed group was only about 1% of the total.

They had no clear objective.

If a group of Level 0 boys gathered in the streets at night, they were treated as part of Skill-Out. Consequently, there were Skill-Out groups that were just 3 or 4 people gathered in a convenience store parking lot and some that made teams of a hundred and strutted around the streets.

“Hey, now. The scale of this job keeps getting smaller and smaller. The higher ups aren’t betting on how far I’ll go before I snap, are they?”

“Not at all. Just so you know, Skill-Out has apparently reorganized recently. When an Anti-Skill unit tried to suppress them, they turned the tables on the unit forcing them to retreat. So it isn’t all that surprising that this has come to an unofficial unit like Group.”

“Hmph,” Accelerator said in annoyance.

Strategy or force. The good-for-nothings in the back alleys must have come by

one of those.

“It seems Skill-Out is making some toys.”

“Toys?”

“They are drilling into oak wood and packing explosives inside. They are about 5 cm in diameter and 70 cm in length. They are probably supposed to be rockets as they are completely streamlined and have been confirmed to have 3 PVC fins on the sides.”

“Wait, they’re making pole fire arrows?” Accelerator couldn’t help but laugh. “Those were experimental weapons in the Edo period. What, have they gotten obsessed with archeology or something? They were said to fly 2000 meters, but they weren’t all that powerful. If you packed ‘em with high grade plastic explosives, things would be different, but they’re probably using handmade explosives. They can’t make a single fucking scratch on a research facility wall with that. How are they supposed to be causing problems?”

“It seems that with some preliminary arrangements, they can be quite effective,” Unabara said in a calm voice. “For the past few days, they have been doing a lot of work. They have been moving abandoned cars into the designated emergency paths and clogging the drains around the entrances and exits to VIP facilities with trash. It’s all small things like that that aren’t treated as security issues.”

“…When the hell did we get stuck with cleaning up kids’ pranks?”

“But it seems that over 20,000 of these problems that are too minor to qualify as errors have been prepared already. And even though they could be ignored in peaceful times, when the alert is at orange or red, they are detected as errors. Which means…”

“So an attack by those pole fire arrows could cause a problem?”

“If they use those rockets, they could trigger a Code Orange. And as soon as the alert level rises, the 20,000 ‘bombs’ Skill-Out has been setting up over the past few days will trigger as error reports all at once. If the large number of error reports knocks out the server that provides security for the communications network, Skill-Out will be able to do whatever they want around the city without Anti-Skill coming.”

“Also, it seems this ‘hole’ in the security is not one that can be filled in just a day or two,” Unabara added.

“That’s quite a story… But how can you be so sure of their aim? Isn’t this just your guess?”

“Not at all. *I have captured a number of them and separately made them talk*, so there’s no mistaking it.”

Accelerator remained silent for a moment after hearing Unabara’s words, but he decided it wasn’t his place to criticize him. After all, he had taken out about 10,000 more people than that himself.

“So they can’t fight without making preparations? To think about all that little stuff, they must be nothing but cowards.” Accelerator spoke as if he was spitting out the words. “So what are they after? Are they going to attack a military research facility and steal some powered suits?”

“No. Facilities like that have independent security departments. Most likely, Skill-Out is simply attempting to rebel against the espers.”

“Ha. So they’re just cutting off the communications network and overwhelming them? Using pure numbers does seem like the kind of strategy Level 0s like.”

Anywhere from dozens to hundreds of them would corner a single esper and crush them. If they went around the city repeating that strategy, even a group of Level 0s could cause quite a disaster.

“…If Skill-Out’s plan succeeds, the communication network for at least 2 or 3 districts will go down. Which means we should assume the damage caused would be rather high.”

Unabara tilted his head to the side in puzzlement and asked Accelerator a question.

“Skill-Out seems to have quite a showy plan, but will it really work? Even if a few dozen of them surrounded a Level 5 like you armed with handguns and other self-defense equipment, I doubt they could do anything.”

“Even a small opening can look attractive, and those idiots will jump at the

slightest chance. Their plan will probably end up being a dud. A half-assed plan will give you half-assed results with only a half-assed amount of damage done."

The ones that Skill-Out hated most due to their clear inferiority complex was the Level 5s like Accelerator.

But he didn't think any Level 5s would be defeated with a plan like this. So the members of Skill-Out must have settled for a target they could attack more easily.

The only espers that would be defeated with this were powerless Level 1s and Level 2s.

Level 2s.

Mass produced military espers and the single girl that controlled them from above.

Who was going to pay for this violence that had lost sight of its goal?

"…This is bullshit," Accelerator mumbled.

Then he spoke to Unabara.

"The danger doesn't come from Skill-Out." Accelerator spat on the floor. "The danger comes from the possibility of some religious group attacking at the hole opened up by the Skill-Out attack. Those bastards on the board of directors don't give a fuck about the people in the back alleys."

"I see you have a good understanding of how things work."

"So what are you waiting around for? If you know what they're after, can't you just turn off the automatic alert system? If Code Orange is never triggered, the communications network won't go down, right?"

"If we weren't at war, we would do so. But that would be like turning off your computer's security software when an attack could be coming at any time."

"So we've got enemies on the outside and inside. Academy City really has pissed off a lot of people."

“And it is our job to deal with those people,” Unabara said while smiling. “Redoing Academy City’s security system won’t fix the problem in time. Anti-Skill and Judgment are working to fix the obstructions in the emergency paths and the entrances and exits of VIP facilities, but there is no guarantee that Skill-Out will just wait until they finish. That is why we need to physically stop them.”

“Ha ha. So it needs to be done in a way too dirty to ask Anti-Skill to do, huh?”

“The target’s name is Komaba Ritoku. He is currently both the leader and brains of Skill-Out.”

Unabara pointed to a picture on the screen on his cell phone.

“He is supposed to be quite an influential person in the back alleys of District 7. Have you heard of him?”

“No. I have no reason to remember those people.”

“This time the Skill-Out plan can be preemptively stopped by quickly taking care of Komaba Ritoku.”

“That isn’t going to stop those bastards. Their preliminary arrangements are complete, right? As long as the alert goes to orange, they win. Currently, all of Academy City is at yellow. They’re halfway there before starting. Their leader dying isn’t going to stop the rest from-...”

“It will,” Unabara cut off Accelerator. “They have a specific spot prepared for the explosives. As I said before, they have been setting things up at the entrances and exits of VIP facilities and in emergency paths. Well, it seems there is a characteristic way that they are doing it. An explosion in a specific area will cause that area to go to orange or higher which will cause the automatic security to look for errors there. The system will find a ‘problem affecting the safety of a facility’ in the area, so it will check the nearby areas that personnel will be moved through. It seems their plan is that this will continue and the error area will grow exponentially.”

“And,” Unabara continued, “it seems only Komaba Ritoku knows where the spot for the explosion where it all starts is. At the very least, the Skill-Out members I captured didn’t know it. It seems there was a need to hold the reins tightly to

ensure the success of the plan and to prevent anyone from starting it prematurely."

"Keh. He's just making sure he's important enough to keep around." Accelerator spat these words out and shook his hands lightly. "I'll take out that Komaba guy if you want, but I'd be worried about me trigging a Code Red. Unlike you people, things can get a little *crazy* when I fight."

"If Code Orange or higher is triggered someplace other than the place Komaba has set up for the explosion, his plan won't work. Because Academy City is divided up into such small security areas, that would likely only trigger an alert for a small area. All the preparation they have gone through is needed for it spread to a large area."

"…Fuck, if you know this much about it, how can you not know where that critical explosion point is? With that, you could just get someone to guard that area."

"Well, the only way to get that information is to ask Komaba Ritoku directly…"

Unabara Mitsuki grinned as he spoke.

"And if we're going to do that, we might as well take him out while we're at it, don't you think?"

Part 2

Accelerator headed to the scene in a truck.

He was sitting in the passenger seat of a garbage truck. But its body was jet black and all of the windows were smoked.

“We have to clean up bodies too, so this is just more convenient,” said the middle-aged man gripping the steering wheel next to him. “The interior of the storage area in the back can be taken out and discarded. After each collection, it’s disposed of along with the bodies and replaced.”

(So it’s like a disposable pack for a vacuum?)

Accelerator was amazed.

“So the garbage this truck takes is corpses, huh? That’s a pretty grim job.”

It seemed to run on electricity instead of gasoline. Because of that, it made almost no noise when it ran. It was perfect for covert actions.

Accelerator watched the scenery go by out the window and spoke.

“What’s with the smoke-tinted glass? I doubt you cart anyone rich around in this thing.”

“Well, we can’t have our faces seen in this job.”

The truck and the driver’s outfit didn’t look thrown together. They had been formally prepared by Academy City for this type of job. He didn’t know how they got their funds, but with this equipment it looked like an entire Anti-Skill district’s worth of funds had been used.

The middle-aged man spoke to Accelerator during a break in the conversation he was having over the truck’s radio.

“You’re part of Group, right? And I hear this is your first job.”

“Your point?”

“Nothing really,” the driver said while looking straight ahead. “I just think sometimes that, even though I have no skills beyond being able to drive you around, there are people who wouldn’t be dragged down to hell if I wasn’t here.”

“…”

“Well, I’m sure they can get plenty of other drivers, but I still think about it. For

instance, if I just held down the gas now, I might be able to save at least one person."

"Ha. You've got guts. With guts like that you shouldn't be wasting your time on a job like this."

"Everyone else like Tsuchimikado-san and Unabara-san says the same thing. I wonder why."

"Because you're a sentimental, good person," Accelerator muttered under his breath.

The GPS navigation system informed them that they had reached their destination with a recorded woman's voice. The electric garbage truck silently came to a stop.

Accelerator opened the passenger side door, put his cane that had a modern design on the ground, and finally put his shoe down on the dirty roadway.

He heard a voice from behind him.

"As I was instructed, I'll be back to pick you up in 20 minutes. Be careful."

"So I'll be taken away on that thing whether I win or lose. Either as I came or as a corpse." Without turning around, he responded with a slightly amused voice.

The truck drove off behind him. He ignored it and looked around slowly.

It looked like most other parts of the city.

But this place had a different atmosphere. It was a strained atmosphere and it felt like evil presences were watching from the various entrances to the alleys. It felt like a swamp you would never be able to leave once you entered it.

While standing at an alley entrance, there were numerous iron stakes driven into the road surface at his feet.

The partially rusted stakes were at varying heights from 10 cm to 30 cm and were closely packed together from the entrance to about a meter in. It was like a thicket of iron.

(I see. This is to keep the security robots out.)

Accelerator laughed scornfully.

The drum-shaped robots in Academy City were made to climb up over various changes in the terrain and they could operate elevators using infrared signals.

But an intentionally made barricade like this was too much for them to get through.

After their “dangerous object evasion sequence” had repeated a certain number of times, they would put that area on hold and overlook it for the time being and then go elsewhere.

“…”

Looking up, there were plastic sheets stretched between the buildings almost covering up the sky. Most of them were blue and some were red or yellow, but it was clear they were just covering the space with whatever they could get across. Because of this, the sunlight was tinted oddly so they looked like speckled stained glass.

They were there to avoid satellite detection.

Anti-Skill would forcibly remove this obstruction on a weekly or monthly basis, but Skill-Out would put it back up soon afterwards. It was a purposeful endless cycle on their part.

That was how they did things.

Easily made. Easily abandoned. Easily redone.

If their barricade was destroyed, they would prepare a new one. If their base was destroyed, they would make a new one elsewhere. If their organization was crushed, failing people would gather together and a new one would be made.

That was why they would never be gone.

For the same reason that roaches would never go extinct, they learned little by little and strengthened their resistance.

This was the result of a type of evolution focused on the negative that no one wanted.

"…What a nostalgic atmosphere."

Accelerator's mouth loosened on its own.

The dark alley spreading out before him was a lawless area where the security robots and the satellite could not reach. Whatever happened, no one would see it. It was a world where no one coming to save you was normal.

"Now then…"

As he was about to go in, his cell phone rang.

He took it out with an irritated look on his face and the display said "Entry 3".

"Tsuchimikado."

"I realized you were starting your first job. Before you begin, I wanted to give you a warning."

"So you're giving me a warning, are you?" Accelerator spat out. "What is it, *senpai*."

"Don't trust us," Tsuchimikado responded. "You, me, and everyone else in Group are people who would find it problematic if what we're doing became public. As Group was created using people like that, there is no way out."

"…Were you hoping I'd be grateful you told me that?"

"If you just follow the rules the board of directors has laid out, they aren't going to let you out. This is made so they profit no matter what happens. You need to think about how you can win in this situation. We both have things we need to protect."

"…" Accelerator briefly remained silent.

He was reminded of a girl who must have been in the hospital at that time.

But he sealed up his expression, his actions, and his words before that could be

seen by anyone else.

“Is that all you wanted?”

“Yes, it was. Finish this up quickly and come on back. Musujime should be starting her job about now. Make sure you don’t get caught up in that.”

(Her job?)

Just as Accelerator started looking confused…

Boom!!

A high-pitched explosion resounded from down the narrow, narrow alley.

It sounded pretty far away, but a lukewarm wind hit his face. While he was being bathed in the dust- and dirt-filled air, Accelerator asked Tsuchimikado a question.

For a second, he had thought Komaba Ritoku’s plan had started, but Tsuchimikado seemed oddly calm for that to be the case. After thinking for a second, he came up with a good guess.

“Is Musujime using bombs? And no one told me this was going to be a fucking competition.”

“She isn’t aiming for people; she’s aiming for money.” Tsuchimikado replied in an unconcerned voice. “Skill-Out has funds for their activities. They have various ways of decentralizing its storage, but she’s taking it out anyway. After all, burning it is better than giving them a chance to run off with it.”

The sound of explosions continued.

But Skill-Out was used to fights that used that kind of weapon. They wouldn’t falter from that alone. Someone with a suitable power was needed to stand in this battlefield.

He was pretty sure Musujime Awaki’s power was Move Point. She could move objects wherever she wanted free of any three-dimensional restrictions.

She must have been using that power again.

“So she can still be useful. And I thought she was just Group’s decoration. Wasn’t her unstable mental condition keeping her from using her powers?”

“She’s the same as you,” Tsuchimikado responded while listening to the explosions over the phone. “That’s being compensated for.”

“Okay, fine. So, I can just use this confusion to take out the Skill-Out members here before they can regroup, right?”

“Well, with their money supply being attacked, I doubt their leader will just run away, but your main target is Komaba Ritoku, the bastard leading them all. Don’t let him get away.”

“I’m more worried about doing *too much* destruction. Digging flesh out of rubble sounds like a pain in the ass.”

Accelerator decided to hang up.

He put the phone in his pocket and moved his other hand up to the back of his neck without letting go of his cane. It looked like he was checking the movement of a joint, but that was where the switch for his choker-style electrode was.

“Well, I guess I should get started.”

He sensed a number of people around him.

There were over 20 sights of handguns and bow guns pointed towards him from within the alley, from the windows of the buildings, and from any other cover someone could find.

In response, Accelerator ever so slightly smiled.

This was the place he had once wanted to make his way out of even if he had to crawl through the dirt.

“Looks like I have some cleaning up to do. I’ll be done in 10 minutes.”

He was back with a smile on his face.

Part 3

Musujime Awaki was walking through a dark alley.

Because there were variously colored plastic sheets spread from building to building above her, the sunlight was tinted in various colors such as blue, red, and yellow. The flow of air was stagnated and the smell of trash and dirt permeated the area. The walls were covered in crude graffiti and a rusted remnant of an ATM that had been brought in from somewhere was lying on the ground with its cover pried open. The area must have had no shortage of activity because there were things like a saw with broken teeth and broken lumber lying around.

And as she walked through that area, Musujime was wearing a piece of cloth wrapped over her bare breasts as innerwear and a blazer that looked like it was part of a school uniform worn over her shoulders. That and her incredibly short skirt made it look like she was asking for something to happen.

But no one touched her.

Not a single one.

“…Too easy.”

The large man who had tried to swing a metal pipe at her and the skinny woman who had tried to shoot her with a bow from a window had been dealt with the same way. Musujime used her Move Point power to take things like rusted broken down cars and metal dumpsters that were in the area and forcibly move them in front of her as shields. After defending against the attack, she would take the corkscrews she had and directly stick them into her opponent’s arms and legs. It always ended with that same pattern.

Spinning in her hand was a military flashlight that could also be used as a baton. She used it to assist with her power by aligning her aim with it. Because her power had too high a level of freedom, if she didn't establish her own point of reference, her aim was too vague.

She spoke in a bored voice while swinging the tool in her hand around.

"You don't necessarily get an advantage by gathering a large group of people and you don't necessarily win by gathering weapons. But I suppose only people who can't figure that much out would join a back alley gang in the first place."

In contrast to her calm, the area erupted into a roaring storm.

To defend against attacks from all directions, Musujime had created a tiny tornado with herself at the center. It was formed from a number of thick metal objects like a manhole lid and an iron plate. Her Move Point made no noise, but the number of projectiles hitting those shields made quite a din.

Musujime pulled the pin out of a grenade with her mouth and threw it towards the now lidless manhole.

A muffled explosion could be heard coming from the sewer.

From the information they had gathered, a safe about the size of a handbag was hidden down there.

"That's #9. …This just isn't satisfying enough."

Ever since she had caused an incident on September 14th and had the tables turned on her by Shirai Kuroko of Judgment, a mental irregularity had put her in a slump where she couldn't use her powers.

The reason she had recovered from that was…

(…When I first heard about this, I thought it was complete bullshit, but I guess the technical team is just that good.)

She had electrodes stuck on her shoulders and her back that looked like compresses. It was a small Low-Frequency Vibration Therapy device. Simply put, it was a massage machine that sent electric currents into her body. The

machine measured the disturbances in her brain waves and created the most effective pulse pattern based on that.

It wasn't perfect, but it certainly helped keep her stress down to a certain level.

(On the other hand, walking around with compresses all over your body isn't exactly how a girl wants to live her life.)

Even though she had been able to get back in action with the help of these machines, there had been a major effect on the incident from September 14th.

The ringleader of that incident had been Musujime Awaki, but she was not the only one in the criminal group. In order to steal the Remnant, a part of Tree Diagram, she had gotten the help of a few dozen espers who shared her ideals. Most of them had been defeated by that Railgun and captured by Anti-Skill.

And she was the only one that had made it back out on the streets.

Currently, there was no clear crime in Academy City called treason. But no one was going to protect the civil liberties of a traitor who threatened the peace of the city. So the punishment was carried out in secret regardless of the law. And it was done in a brutal way that took advantage of that lawlessness.

She had to do something.

Her comrades who had once walked on the same path as her were in trouble.

"…"

Musujime threw a grenade into a crack on a large outdoor air conditioning unit and the bundle of bills hidden inside was blown to pieces.

And she continued further into the alley.

(Cash, gold bars, an access card to an IT Bank under a fake corporate name… This really is quite spread out. How did they gather all this money?)

Apparently, Komaba Ritoku the leader running everything in the area had banned the prostitution of girls. Since he had sealed off one of the quickest methods of gathering funds, he must have had some other method.

(I suppose it doesn’t really matter. I’m just here to make sure it’s all destroyed. Just another 14 areas and I can leave.)

As she thought cheerfully, she slowly spun the flashlight around in her hand.

“…I’d like for you to stop that, esper.”

A male voice suddenly cut off Musujime’s thoughts.

About 10 meters in front of her in the straight, narrow alley, a large gorilla-like man was standing. He must have come from one of the buildings’ back entrances. His hard muscles were covered by a cheap jacket, but it looked like it was going to rip apart if he flexed his muscles even slightly.

He looked like an incarnation of destruction, but his voice was quite melancholy in comparison.

His voice sounded like he had copy paper coming from his mouth as he spoke.

“We distributed our money like this to prevent it from all being lost at once. You could say it’s like how a coward afraid of being mugged carries several wallets. Having all of your possessions stolen at once isn’t a very popular option.”

Instead of responding, Musujime pulled out her cell phone right in front of her enemy.

She looked at the screen, checked the photo there, and gave a surprised gasp.

“Komaba Ritoku. Oh, my. It seems I’ve run into the target first.”

At some point, the Skill-Out members who had been surrounding her had disappeared.

Komaba must have used his authority to have them evacuate.

He didn’t want them to get in his way.

“Don’t be mad, Accelerator.”

“That name… I suppose I should have abandoned the money instead of being

greedy if someone like that is coming…”

Musujime wasn’t really paying attention to Komaba’s words.

She closed her cell phone with a snap and put it in her pocket.

She then slowly brought her flashlight up at the ready.

“Move Point, huh? A troublesome power.”

“Do you really think it’s only troublesome?”

“I suppose you’re right. I hate it much more than something that is only troublesome.”

It may have been a characteristic trait of members of the Level 0 group Skill-Out, but Komaba’s copy paper-like words had dark emotions mixed in.

(It doesn’t really matter), thought Musujime.

He was 10 meters away on a straight, narrow path. She would use her corkscrews on him. No matter how strong Komaba was, he would fall to the ground before he could take 3 steps. And even if he was hiding a handgun or other long-distance weapon, Musujime could just call in a “shield”.

“I’ll end this with one right between the eyes.”

“So you‘ll spare me any pain? …I’m so moved.”

Without saying anything else, Musujime swung her flashlight and sent a command to a corkscrew in her pocket. Ignoring the visible three dimensional vectors, the corkscrew flew through space using the theoretical values of the 11th dimension and headed right towards Komaba Ritoku’s forehead.

And it missed.

“Wha-…?”

Seeing the corkscrew appear in empty space, Musujime’s eyes widened in shock. She felt a slight pain in her back. In response to her tension, the stress-lowering low frequency vibration treatment device had sent out a stronger pulse.

It wasn’t that Musujime Awaki had aimed incorrectly.

Komaba had suddenly disappeared.

A roar like a dump truck driving by came from directly behind her.

“…Too slow.”

Along with that quiet voice, she felt a dull pain on the very top of her head like something heavy had fallen on her. As her consciousness fluttered in and out, Musujime realized that Komaba had forcefully swung his fist down at her.

An electric current ran through her shoulders and back.

Up until now, the device had helped her, but now it was just being a bother.

“Kh!?”

She looked over her shoulder and called an old abandoned car to the spot Komaba was standing in. This was no shield; she was trying to crush her target.

But Komaba was no longer there.

He had jumped 7 meters straight up into the air.

“Don’t be surprised…”

A sign or an air conditioning unit must have been installed there at one time, because Komaba was standing on a rectangular prism of a metal bar sticking out from the wall at the 2nd floor.

With an explosive noise, he kicked the metal bar, breaking it, and the pieces flew towards Musujime with enormous speed.

“I’m taking this seriously,” he continued.

Musujime couldn’t hear the sound of Komaba landing.

This was because the many sharp cross-sections of the metal bar quickly came at her all at once.

“!?”

She hurriedly called the old car she had attacked with to appear right in front of her.

She had intended to use it as a shield, but the metal bars were moving quickly enough to easily pierce through it. Musujime instinctually held her hands up to cover her face, but they only grazed her thigh and the brutal weapon stabbed into the asphalt and stopped.

As she watched the metal bars vibrated slightly, a chill ran down Musujime’s spine.

(A shield is useless if it’s destroyed so easily…!!)

“…Don’t look so dissatisfied. When fighting against a monster like you, I deserve some kind of preparation, don’t I?”

Komaba Ritoku’s low laughing voice reached Musujime’s ears.

Looking through the rusted car’s windows that had no glass in them, she managed to spot Komaba’s face. He was standing about 10 meters ahead in the small alleyway with concrete walls on either side.

(I’ve got him!!)

Musujime concentrated. She gave a slight wave of her flashlight calling for 5 corkscrews that were lying on the ground nearby and moved them all at once to coordinates inside Komaba’s body.

But…

“…You won’t hit me.”

There was a loud roar that didn’t sound like something that could come from a human body. Komaba zigzagged left and right down the narrow alley at a tremendous speed avoiding all of the teleported attacks Musujime sent at him.

And that wasn’t all.

“You can have these back. I prefer cheap booze to fine wine.” Komaba lifted his leg as he dodged the corkscrews. “I have no use for corkscrews.”

He gave a kick that sounded like a whip. His leg accurately hit the corkscrews that were still falling from the air and launched them at terrifying speed towards Musujime.

“…!!”

She had no time to move her flashlight and use Move Point.

The corkscrews flew through the car windows and straight for her.

She immediately moved her head to the side and received a light scratch on her right cheek. The sound of the air being split sounded from right next to her ear and the electrodes on her back and shoulders pumped out its relaxing signal to its limits.

(Ow… How can a flesh-and-blood human move like that?)

Komaba’s movements weren’t like those of an automobile that just moves straight ahead.

His movements contained the subtle and minute adjustments characteristic of a living being.

“That mobility… You have **Hard Taping**[1] under your clothes, don’t you!?”

“So you’ve figured it out.”

Komaba slowly approached Musujime with undetectable footsteps.

The broken down car was between them, but Komaba would easily be able to jump over it.

To stop him, Musujime took irregular steps back about every time he took one to put some distance between them.

At some point, the roles of attacker and defender had been completely reversed.

“In my case, I have 6 ligaments in my knee protected and the muscles in my leg

that are connected to my femur, my tibia, and my fibula reinforced from the outside. I also have metal plates in my shoes to keep my foot from being destroyed… Getting a hold of this special military-use ultrasonic wave elastic taping wasn't easy."

The taping was mainly on his legs, but he must have had it lightly reinforcing his entire body as well. You couldn't balance with just your legs and, if you lost your balance while moving at high speed, you would collapse spectacularly.

"You could say this is just the portion of a powered suit that gives it its mobility taken out and isolated. If you want to kill me, you should have brought something with enough firepower to take out an armored weapon…"

"Hmph. Is Hard Taping really that convenient?" Musujime spoke with a smile in her lips.

But a cold sweat was appearing on her face.

She could move various objects ignoring the three dimensional limitations by using theoretical 11th dimensional vectors, but one exception was herself. If she moved herself, it caused her extreme mental damage. The low frequency vibration treatment device was supposed to compensate for this, but she didn't know if she could actually pull it off. The odds were probably worse than 50/50. It was even possible that she wouldn't be able to bear the mental pressure and her memories would distract her keeping her from using her powers properly or making any proper judgments.

She couldn't get out of this easily.

But even if she could turn this around, she had to create the opportunity to do so herself.

With that in mind, Musujime moved her mouth in an attempt to stall for time.

"Powered suits aren't that big because the parts needed for mobility and the thickness of the armor take up that much space. It's because they have to put in safety devices for the pilots as well."

As she spoke, Musujime carefully examined her surroundings.

The alley was straight and narrow. If Komaba attacked, escape would be pretty much impossible. The broken down car was in between them, but she doubted that would stop him.

“A powered suit has much higher mobility than a fully-equipped vehicle. It can move at speeds greater than 10 times what a vehicle can. But it’s still a flesh-and-blood human inside.”

Dodging or blocking Komaba’s attack was going to be difficult.

Musujime gripped her flashlight tighter and continued analyzing.

“I see. …You’re talking about the body protection.”

“If you suddenly go from a standstill to high speed, there is a risk of pulled or torn muscles. That’s why the powered suits have multiple safety devices created to prevent that from happening. Similar to this low frequency vibration treatment device I’m using, the muscles are constantly having electrical stimuli given to them so that they are always in a state similar to after having performed warm-up exercises. That way the damage from sudden motion can be prevented.”

In the end, her only choice was to use Move Point to defeat Komaba Ritoku before his attack arrived.

If she didn’t end this before his first attack, her life could be in danger.

“Your Hard Taping has no such safety features,” Musujime informed him while spinning her flashlight in her hand.

Komaba Ritoku’s expression did not change.

“That’s a defective item that failed Anti-Skill’s tests. It may do quite a bit of damage to your body. Although, it won’t be anywhere near as much as I will.”

“Heh…”

Komaba laughed even as a clear weakness was pointed out.

“I’m prepared for that much… I have been ever since I swore I would fight monsters like you even though I’m a Level 0.”

His giant gorilla-like body swelled up another size bigger.

Most likely, he was working to resist the damage as much as possible by regulating his body in a rational way even more subtly than a professional athlete would. His body had turned into a single giant weapon.

“I need to finish this as soon as possible.”

(Tch.)

“…I have a lot I need to do!!”

(I’m really not going to get a chance to get away!!)

A loud roar sounded out.

Komaba Ritoku shot towards Musujime with a speed at which he would have been able to outstrip a train.

“!!”

Musujime instinctually took a step back and spun her military flashlight around.

She threw a giant sign at the spot Komaba Ritoku was in.

But by the time the command had been sent, he was no longer there. He ran further and further forward like a rocket shattering the asphalt under his feet.

(Kh… He’s too fast. I don’t have time to indicate his coordinates!!)

Musujime’s throat was dry.

Komaba flew towards her with a roar and landed on the roof of the abandoned car she had been using as a shield. The red, rusted metal cracked under the force and his feet sank deeply into it. Ignoring that, Komaba lifted his foot. He was going to crush Musujime under that foot as she hid behind the car.

He was only a step away now.

“Ah-ahhhh!!”

Musujime moved back while feeling a chill.

She gave up on attacking and moved a nearby metal dumpster in front of her. The thick metal box was big enough to hold 4 unit baths and she used it to block Komaba's attack.

But…

"So thin…"

Musujime heard a faint laughing voice from the other side of the supposedly thick wall.

And…

"…You can't stop me with a mere *membrane* like this."

Musujime Awaki clearly saw the dumpster explosively expand from the inside out right in front of her eyes.

Komaba Ritoku used one of his legs which were reinforced by the Hard Taping to kick into it like his leg was a metal stake.

An explosive noise reached Musujime's ears directly afterwards.

Komaba's foot slammed into the dumpster like a dump truck, tore into the thick metal box, and smashed the contents to pieces scattering them everywhere.

An unpleasant clanging noise rang out from the metal falling to the ground.

The wreckage flew over 10 meters in front of Komaba. It looked like a giant dragon had vomited everywhere.

There was no way to determine where the body was. There was just something reddish brown mixed in with the partially decayed trash. The purple pieces must have been the organs. Her military flashlight was lying on the ground. After being cruelly crushed, there was only a red liquid stuck to the ground.

"Hmph…"

Even after seeing the hair mixed in with the blood, Komaba Ritoku's expression

did not change.

He merely spoke in his usual way that sounded like copy paper was coming from his mouth.

“…That was too quick. I didn’t even get to use my specialty…”

Part 4

Just as he had announced, Accelerator had quieted the Skill-Out group within 10 minutes.

But he hadn’t used his powers that entire time.

At first, he had manipulated the atmosphere to create a gust of wind greater than 50 m/s knocking most of his enemies to the ground. He then turned off his powers and shot them while their movements were in disorder. When they were about to counterattack, he would create another gust of wind and start shooting again once they were rendered helpless. That pattern had repeated again and again.

He had easily won after 10 minutes.

Because of this strategy, he hadn’t even used 30 seconds of powered time.

In his battle with Hound Dog and their leader Kihara Amata, he had learned just how much a weakness the electrode’s battery was. He had to learn how to economize in his use of the battery.

“Now then. Where’s that bastard Komaba Ritoku everyone’s talking about? He wasn’t in that group I just took out, was he?”

Accelerator moved his hand to the back of his neck and flipped the switch off. He looked around to make sure there were no enemies left and headed further into the alley.

He had blown everything away with the wind, but, after walking a mere 100 meters in, the scenery was back to rusted metal trash and colored plastic sheets hiding the sky.

Accelerator suddenly stopped and leaned on his cane.

Musujime's explosions had stopped.

"Tch. So her quota's done. I don't like being the last one done."

He tilted his head to the side in annoyance, but…

"Then…I suppose I can let you take a break."

Those words abruptly reached Accelerator's ears.

He continued down the narrow alley and found a building that looked only partially completed. It was only made out of a steel frame, so it looked like a giant jungle gym. And on the 4th floor, which was about halfway up, a large gorilla-like man was standing.

The man spoke in a quiet voice that sounded like copy paper was coming from his mouth.

"Accelerator...Quite a famous visitor. But I never thought you'd be hunting us down as a dog of the board of directors…"

"So you must be Komaba Ritoku." Accelerator looked up at the steel framework. "I suppose I should ask. What was the reason for this plan of yours?"

"Even if I told you, you don't actually care why Skill-Out is attacking espers."

"Hah. From that I take it that when you got out on the streets you would be attacking everyone indiscriminately."

"No, not indiscriminately... We would choose our targets carefully…"

“You seem pretty calm. Do you really understand the situation here?”

“There was a girl telling me the same thing just a bit ago.”

As he spoke, Komaba took something off of his belt and lightly tossed it down.

It was a blood-smeared military flashlight.

It hit the steel frame a few times on the way down and finally fell onto the asphalt where its glass lens and light bulb shattered.

“I killed her.”

“…”

Accelerator remained silent for a second at that quick comment.

Komaba frowned.

“You’re taking this peacefully… This isn’t the kind of person I was told you were. So you really have changed. Loners usually don’t hesitate at times like this. And they end up dying because they try to stand up to me. I’m well past the point where I worry about how to clean up a corpse…”

“I see.” Accelerator smiled slightly as he spoke. “Did you know that people who stand up to me tend to end up as mincemeat?”

Still smiling, he moved his hand to the switch on the back of his neck.

“Hoo…” Komaba exhaled. “If you’re going to try to act cool, at least be battle ready before hand…”

“You do realize you’re talking to Academy City’s strongest Level 5, right?”

“…Confronting monsters like you is what Skill-Out does best.”

Komaba tapped the back of his neck with his pointer finger.

“That electrode…is a transmitter for some kind of electronic information, isn’t it?”

“Tch!!” Accelerator clicked his tongue and flipped the switch for the electrode.

He altered the vectors for his legs. The asphalt beneath his feet cracked and he shot like a rocket towards the fourth floor where Komaba was standing.

But Komaba was faster.

He pulled what looked like a spray can from his pocket and hit it with a whip-like kick. His kick was delivered with a force one wouldn’t expect from a normal person and it tore the metal can to pieces like it was made of paper. Its contents scattered through the air.

The contents were thin sheets of metal about the size of the lead to a mechanical pencil. They glittered in the dim back alley. They were composed of two thin wings so they looked like tiny helicopter rotors.

Hundreds of these thin sheets of metal stopped in midair while slowly rotating like bamboo copters.

“…These are a type of radio jamming weapon called **Chaff Seeds**. …They use a micro motor to float in the air using the structure of the seeds of plants in the Dipterocarpaceae family…”

Komaba’s expression remained unchanged as he spoke.

“I originally had this to knock out Anti-Skill radios.”

“!!”

Accelerator’s power of ascent suddenly stopped.

He didn’t reach the 4th floor Komaba was on; he fell down and landed on the framework of the third floor.

Even his reflection ability must have been knocked out, because pain spread through his back like it would for a normal person.

“Gh..ah!?”

He let out a cry, but he didn’t have room to writhe around.

“I had seen something like that just a bit before.”

When he heard the quiet voice come from above him, Accelerator quickly looked up.

“The teleporter who attacked had something like that on her back… Hers probably works differently than yours and I don’t know exactly why the two of you are wearing them… But I’m betting they assist you with your powers.”

A shadow stretched out.

Komaba jumped down from the 4th floor aiming for Accelerator’s gut with both his feet.

If that hit him, his organs would rupture.

He had a handgun, but that giant body wouldn’t stop if he shot it.

“Tch! Fucker!!”

Accelerator gave up trying to attack, brought his arms and legs in, and rolled like a ball backwards on the narrow frame.

Komaba’s feet landed forcefully in the spot Accelerator had just been in.

A loud dull noise came from the metal.

Stopping his roll, Accelerator brought his handgun up and fired in response, but Komaba moved his upper body dodging the 3 shots fired. He wasn’t watching the bullets; he was keeping away from the barrel.

The cartridges that smelled of fireworks fell all the way to the ground.

“…How unsightly.” A smile spread across Komaba’s face. “If your powers were perfect, you wouldn’t need a gun…And you wouldn’t have avoided my attack.”

(God damn it. I just have to stop his movements by shooting him in the lower back!!)

Accelerator gritted his teeth and altered his aim. But…

“Heh… Don’t fall off.”

As he spoke, Komaba brought his foot down and the 3rd floor framework broke in half like a tree branch.

(…!? That strength…!!)

No normal human could produce that attack and Komaba was Level 0. That meant he must have some kind of equipment supporting him.

“…Kh!!”

As his already unstable footing slanted to the side, Accelerator’s aim strayed a good ways from Komaba. And before he could bring it back, Komaba’s gigantic body was headed for him.

(I still can’t use my powers!!)

The numerous glittering metal Chaff Seeds were still floating in the air like bamboo copters. They were spread evenly all throughout the area, so trying to brush them away with his hand wasn’t going to help much.

Accelerator clicked his tongue as Komaba Ritoku approached.

There was a roaring wind.

Even with the unstable footing, Komaba had moved a few meters in an instant.

And…

He was using his powerful leg to attack with a crushing kick.

“!!”

Accelerator immediately twisted his body, but that leg knocked his gun off of the frame. Komaba had been aiming for the gun the whole time. His speed had been too fast to react to.

“…You’re going to burst open and paint this area red.”

Komaba pulled a handgun of his own from his belt. It was a large handgun with

an odd form that had two thick magazines sticking into it just in front of the trigger.

This wasn't an attack Accelerator could avoid by moving his head to the side.

(Shit!!)

He prepared himself and jumped with all his might to the side and then right off the framework.

The 2nd floor was next.

But since he dove off without looking, he messed up the timing on his landing and struck the framework without being able to soften the blow. He fell down another floor because of it. The impact made a dull noise. He had partially landed once partway down, but he had fallen to the ground from the 3rd floor all the same. The pain was more than one could bear just by gritting one's teeth. And for someone who left everything to his powers instead of training his body like Accelerator, it was even worse.

"Gwaaaah!!" Accelerator yelled while holding the top of his shoulder.

Komaba ignored his scream and pulled the trigger.

As he rolled on the dirty ground, Accelerator somehow managed to avoid the bullet.

The power of the bullet was much greater than a normal one. It pierced a steel frame partway down and the thick piece of metal exploded from the inside. The frame was transformed into a large number of small metal pieces and they rained down on Accelerator. He was rolling on the ground, but he still received small tears on his skin.

"Tch!!"

Accelerator searched the ground with his gaze looking for something.

(…! There it is!!)

He grabbed his handgun that Komaba had kicked down.

He rolled onto his back, held the gun up in both hands, aimed towards the framework above, and pulled the trigger.

The gunshot rang out.

But Komaba wasn't there. The bullet flew through empty space and hit the edge of one of the plastic sheets covering the sky. The bullet must have hit the clasp because the sheet blew to the side.

"Checkmate…"

Accelerator heard this monotonous voice that sounded like the written words were being expelled from the speaker's mouth coming from a blind spot diagonally up from his position.

Komaba must have already moved to a different frame.

"I give you one final choice… Where do you want me to shoot you when I kill you?"

"…So you have a **Smart Weapon**."[2]

Accelerator muttered that in annoyance, but it was hard to aim towards Komaba in his state.

He heard the voice coming from outside his vision again.

"My Smart Weapon uses infrared rays to accurately measure the target's composition, solidity, and distance. …And then it mixes the powder that will cause the most appropriate level of destruction. …Then the plastic instantaneously hardens forming the bullet. It can shoot through a steel plate or it can leave the bullet in a piece of tofu. If you have a way you would prefer to die, tell me now. I am confident that I can create almost any type of death while operating it on manual…"

"I see," muttered Accelerator.

If Accelerator was defeated here, Komaba Ritoku would trigger Code Orange which would knock out the communications network. Then he would take advantage of the confusion and indiscriminately attack the espers in the area. But

nothing would be gained by it. Skill-Out just wasn't powerful enough to gain control of the entirety of Academy City.

That was why they had changed from the original target of their violence and were aiming for an "enemy" they could actually defeat.

They were attacking a low-level "enemy" instead of the Level 5s and the board of directors who they truly hated.

The skin on Accelerator's face distorted into a smile.

The law of the back alleys was ruled by strong vs. weak instead of good vs. evil. He was so familiar with it, he wanted to vomit. And Accelerator had parted from the world of light and plunged into the depths of Group in order to fight that type of law.

Accelerator gritted his teeth.

--Are you trying to rule Skill-Out like this?

"In your case, it may be better if you remain suspicious of others' kind words. Especially if you know the value of what you want to protect."

--Are you just going to enjoy causing trouble at your own convenience like this?

"No matter how unsightly it may be, you have no choice but to keep paying back every yen, every fraction of a yen, you can. If you keep adding it up, your path will surely open up before you. After all, you have power unlike me. There are plenty of ways you can pay it all back at once."

--Are you just going to continue bringing misfortune to innocent people like this?

"I'm back, says Misaka as Misaka gives the standard greet-…Ow! Why are you repeatedly chopping me without saying anything!? says Misaka as Misaka holds her head and pretends to cry!!"

(Is he just going to devour other people's happiness just to vent his own pent up anger and satisfy no one but himself!?)

“Fuck that, you piece of shit!”

And with those words, two guns fired.

Part 5

And with that the battle was over.

Who won and who lost was as clear as day. Accelerator’s last ray of hope was that his gun was pointed towards somewhere other than the metal Chaff Seeds scattered throughout the air that were obstructing his powers or his target, Komaba.

And Komaba Ritoku’s Smart Weapon was accurately pointed at him from a blind spot. In shogi, that was called a perfect checkmate. It was a situation where his attack couldn’t reach and his opponent’s attack could take his life.

The fired bullet pierced soft flesh.

The bullet from the Smart Weapon tore through the meat of a person’s side. The scraps of clothes torn off were soaked with blood and the weight kept them from floating. The scraps merely fell to the ground.

A second later, a burning pain ran though that side.

But there was no time to even put a hand to the wound.

“Why…?”

The words naturally seeped out.

The taste of blood spread through that mouth and that red liquid spilled from

those lips.

“Why is your ‘reflection’ back?”

Looking at Komaba coughing up blood above him on the framework, Accelerator gave a thin smile while still lying on the dirty ground.

“You idiot.”

It was a thin, thin, thin, thin, ever so thin smile.

It was a smile that looked like it had been split open by a razor blade. It was a smile that starved for blood.

“After you scatter that foil called chaff into the air, it jams electromagnetic signals. So the solution was simple. I just had to get those thin sheets of metal out of the air somehow. With ventilation, for example.”

“You…don’t mean…”

Komaba looked up.

One of the various colored plastic sheets that were spread from building to building as a satellite countermeasure was blown out of the way. Accelerator’s bullet had knocked off the clasp.

Due to the sudden wind, the Chaff Seeds had blown well out of formation. They could float under their own power to a certain extent, but it wasn’t enough to stand up to a strong blast of wind. A large hole had been blown in their compact formation from before.

“Now then…”

The sound of the ground being struck was heard.

Accelerator must have altered some vector or other because, from lying on his back, he *stood straight up without bending like a door being opened*.

“You need to rethink what it means for a Level 0 to pick a fight with a Level 5!!”

“…Tch!!”

Komaba slowly reached for his pocket.

Whether he used his special gun or strong legs, Komaba Ritoku had no chance of winning now that Accelerator's vector transformation ability was back.

So he must have been trying to disseminate more Chaff Seeds and retreat.

"Too slow!!"

Accelerator kicked some pebbles at his feet.

That was all he did.

Nevertheless, the vector converted pebbles shot strait through Komaba's palm. A loud roar could be heard after the flesh on his hand was torn open.

"Gwaaaaahhh!?"

The Chaff Seed container Komaba had taken out fell and he crouched down holding the wrist of the hand hit. But that was when he lost his balance. While crouched down, he fell from the 3rd floor frame.

Komaba Ritoku wasn't going to die from just that. His legs were strong enough to break those steel frames. If he could regain his balance partway down, he could easily make a proper landing.

And for that very reason, Accelerator showed no mercy.

"Ha ha! C'mon, let me have a little more fun!!"

He altered the vectors of his legs and shot forward like a rocket. He grabbed Komaba's gut just as he was about to land and slammed him into a nearby steel pillar.

He had converted Komaba's falling vector to one straight ahead.

The thick steel pillar bent unnaturally from the impact. Komaba's giant body trembled. His cell phone and the reserve Chaff Seed containers came from his pocket and scattered across the ground.

"Gh…bh…!?"

Komaba coughed up blood, but, regardless of whether it was going to reach Accelerator's face or not, he repelled it to the side so not a single drop landed on him.

He rejected even that.

"Now it's checkmate. You have no feeling left in your lower body, right?"

"Kh…"

"You did a good job of actually managing to keep your Smart Weapon in your hand through all that. I'll give you that much. If you want to continue this, go for it. Seeing people kill themselves like that can be quite fun."

While holding his target by the gut, the edges of Accelerator's lips lifted up.

"It's true Level 0s are weak, but being weak doesn't make you evil."

He was enjoying disgracing this man who was on the verge of death.

"People like that are treated like nuisances because it's always people like you in Skill-Out causing the problems. Give you rights? A guarantee of safety? Fucking ridiculous. Can't you tell you're strangling yourself by doing things like that?"

"…Heh."

All his teeth were stained red, but Komaba still laughed.

"Here's a…hypothetical question…" he said in his voice that sounded like copy paper was coming from his mouth. "These 'harmless Level 0s' you're talking about… If attacking them for no reason became popular among you rotten espers…what would you do?"

Accelerator's eyelids closed slightly out of disinterest.

"Problems with a person's personality aren't taken into account when it comes to whether they get powers or not… There are some people who have powerful abilities but are weak people. These horrible people can do nothing but gloat about it. …I have seen dozens of espers like that who are nothing beyond their powers."

Komaba Ritoku didn’t beg for his life; he merely looked Accelerator in the eye as he spoke.

Skill-Out.

That group was originally created in order to protect themselves from powerful espers.

“And if…it became popular among those people to play a game where they hunted down Level 0s who weren’t part of an organization like Skill-Out…what would you do?”

There was something glowing on the ground.

It was Komaba Ritoku’s cell phone that had fallen when he had struck the steel pillar. The phone had unfolded when it hit the ground and light was coming from the standby screen.

The screen showed a low-resolution photo.

It was of a small elementary school aged girl and Komaba Ritoku standing uncomfortably next to her.

It was a scene far removed from the Skill-Out and the back alleys.

Perhaps Komaba had gone to a lot of effort to distance himself from that kind of thing for that photo.

(This bastard…)

The reorganization of Skill-Out.

The objective of this incident and its result.

What Komaba Ritoku had with him.

“Heh. I knew if I kept taking out-of-place actions it would eventually end like this…”

Accelerator lifted his head when he heard Komaba’s voice.

“But I got to see something good in the end. I suppose it all worked out…”

Komaba looked at Accelerator’s expression and smiled with his blood-covered mouth.

What exactly had Komaba taken from the change in the look on that Level 5’s face?

With slow motions, Komaba pointed his gun right between Accelerator’s eyes.

“It seems…you and I *are living under similar circumstances*.”

A gunshot shook the area.

Accelerator’s “reflection” made no exceptions. The bullet bounced back and flew back into the Smart Weapon’s barrel. The iron weapon was smashed to pieces from the inside and the bullet continued on its path and hit Komaba’s face. And with that Komaba Ritoku’s face was gone. There was a raw noise. The torn pieces looked like a bowl with chipped edges. It looked like a crude container with skin and hair on it that had only brains inside.

Accelerator saw it from point-blank range.

He saw it from closer than anyone else.

“…”

He let go.

The body fell to the ground and the arms and legs bent limply and remained stuck where they were. Komaba wasn’t going to say anything more. He had been a troublesome enemy when he stood in Accelerator’s path, but all resistance had left him.

And Accelerator’s job was over.

His first job had been completed without a hitch.

Part 6

“Well done,” Unabara Mitsuki said from the other end of the phone. “All that remains is transportation of the bodies as well as elimination of evidence. We’ll take care of the empty cartridges and blood stains. That black garbage truck is on its way, so get on that.”

“No,” Accelerator responded while holding his phone. “I’ll come back on my own. I don’t want any favors from you people.”

“That’s fine, but try not to run into anyone you know. There’s a reason we keep ourselves hidden; standing out isn’t going to bring you any favors. I wouldn’t advise it for any of us.”

“Quit speaking down to me. Do you want me to fucking kill you?”

Accelerator gave that parting comment and hung up.

(…Chaff, huh? So there’s an artificial way of jamming electromagnetic waves. Maybe I could carry a bomb or something around to knock that kind of thing out of the air.)

He looked back at the dirty ground as he thought about what he should do in the future.

Komaba Ritoku’s corpse was there with the top half of its face gone. The military flashlight that had broken in its fall was, too.

“Keh.” Accelerator made a noise of annoyance. “I know you’re alive, Musujime Awaki.”

After he spoke, he heard footsteps coming from farther into the back alley.

“I was watching from a window for some of it, but when did you notice me?”

“Heh. It was obvious you were there.”

In order to avoid Komaba Ritoku's gunshots, he had jumped from the 2nd story of the framework.

Accelerator had retrieved his gun from the ground afterwards and counterattacked. However, when he thought about it now, it was obvious that that was just too much good fortune. It was pretty unlikely that his gun would be within reach after he fell. Musujime Awaki had used Move Point to move it within reach.

"Don't interfere in other people's fights."

"Oh? Is that any way to talk to the person that saved your life?"

"…Do you *want* me to kill you?"

"Right back at you."

A thin smile appeared on Musujime's face and she got so close he could feel her breath on his face.

Her eyes were open so wide they looked like dinner plates.

"Did you forget? The only reason I'm here is because you interfered with my fight on that day. If it weren't for you, I could have hidden and gotten more people to help me. Then I could have attacked the facility my comrades are restrained in and rescued them."

The smile on her face looked like it was slicing her head in two as she slowly spoke.

"Heh. Heh heh. If you use your powers to help me with my work in Group and my comrades are released as a result, I'll forgive you. But if you get in my way, you're dead. Make sure your value to me doesn't fall any farther. If you don't you'll have corkscrews all over your body."

"Shut the fuck up, woman." Accelerator cracked his neck as he responded. "You're the one that doesn't understand. You're the one that got so upset just because I smashed some of your luggage. Try and get this in that defective brain of yours. If you waste even a second of my life, you're going to be nothing more than a stain in a back alley."

“…”

“…”

The two stared at each other for a bit, but then a car horn sounded multiple times with short intervals between. It seemed the black garbage truck had arrived at the entrance to the alley.

The tension between them disappeared when they heard that.

“Fucking ridiculous,” Accelerator spat out.

“You’ve got that right,” Musujime Awaki nodded and stepped back.

It wasn’t time for that yet.

“How did you trick Komaba?”

“It was actually quite easy. Because his legs were so powerful, he wasn’t going to leave a corpse. So I used a dumpster as a shield. It was behind a restaurant, so it had a pig bones and organs in it.”

“I used Move Point to move myself, so I did vomit once partway through,” she added.

To add more detail, she had apparently wrapped some hair she had pulled out with Move Point around her flashlight. She could teleport something as particular as specific hairs, but she still found moving herself difficult.

“…So you used a dumpster full of organs that just happened to be there. That was lucky.”

“Yes, it was. I would have just used something else as a shield had I not been so lucky. I could have used one of the other Skill-Out members. I do consider it fortunate that I didn’t have to do that.”

Musujime picked her flashlight up from next to the corpse.

“You did quite a number on him,” she said in a disinterested voice. “Unabara called you, right? What did he say?”

“He said to get on the garbage truck that was coming. I said I’d go back on my own.”

Musujime gave a puzzled look at that.

“Oh? Do you have somewhere you want to go? It’s a bit too soon for lunch.”

“That elegant-acting man asked me that too, but it’s nothing much.”

Accelerator had another cell phone in his hand.

It was a plastic electronic device that was covered in the blood of a man who was now gone.

The standby screen showed a young girl smiling.

And when he pressed a few buttons, a number of phone numbers appeared.

The entry category was “People Requiring Special Attention in Regards to Attacks on Level 0s”.

He looked through the entries.

As he did, he relaxed and spoke.

“I still have a job left to do. A special bonus job.”

Notes

1. ↑ **Kanji:** Spring Bandage
2. ↑ **Kanji:** Calculation Small Arms

Chapter 3: Women's Dorm of the Anglican Church. *Russian_Roulette.*

Part 1

Morning came 9 hours later in London than in Academy City.

With soft sunbeams and the chirping of the birds coming in the window, Kanzaki Kaori stood dumbfounded in the changing room of the women's dorm.

In front of her was a state-of-the-art Academy City fully automated washing machine.

"I told you…Just because the box said it could wash an entire futon doesn't mean it's true."

Because it had been getting colder lately, Kanzaki was wearing a jacket that came down to her navel in addition to her usual T-shirt and one-legged jeans. The jacket had its right arm completely cut off, so her shoulder was visible.

"The way this washing machine works is always giving us trouble…"

There was a sound of an object falling to the ground. It came from Shichiten Shichitou sliding down from where it was leaning against the wall. However, Kanzaki didn't even notice.

October 3rd was her day to do the wash, but this had all been caused by Agnese Sanctis saying she might as well stick the futon in there too, wrapping the thick futon up tightly, and throwing it in the washing machine.

The fully AI-run appliance seemed like it was about to start spewing black

smoke because it was emitting a worrying low rumbling moan as it rattled back and forth.

“…”

Speaking of Agnese, she looked like she was half-in-tears and had her back pressed to the changing room wall as she tried to keep as far from the washing machine as she could. She looked like someone who had been driven into a corner and she was trembling enough to give the washing machine a run for its money. Because Agnese’s shaking looked like it could whip cream, Kanzaki wasn’t sure if she should berate her or not.

That was when Orsola Aquinas came in.

The large-breasted nun’s smiling face was all that could be seen because she was covered from head to toe by her black nun’s habit.

“It’s time for breakfast.”

“It’s too soon!! Can’t you give a little thought to the flow of things so far!?”

“Oh. But I would think that having breakfast at the same time as usual would be the natural flow of things. In fact, isn’t the washing machine the only irregular aspect?”

Kanzaki fell silent.

When she thought about it, Orsola was right.

While her attention was pointed elsewhere, Agnese sang out “B-b-b-breakfast. Breakfast!” and ran out of the changing room.

Kanzaki sighed, scratched her black-ponytailed head, picked her katana up from the ground, and headed for the dining hall. Orsola must have been tired, because her body swayed left and right as she smiled and walked down the hallway.

“Oh, right. Kanzaki-san.”

“What is it?”

“What was that package that came addressed to you the other day? I’m pretty sure it was from Tsuchimikado-san in Japan.”

Kanzaki’s shoulders jumped in surprise.

She messed with her bangs using her thumb and forefinger as she spoke.

“O-oh, it wasn’t really anything. I didn’t feel it was anything worth mentioning.”

“I see. The label had ‘Fallen Angel Maid Set’ written on it in large letters, so everyone found it to be rather disturbing. But it wasn’t anything to worry about?”

“N-no!! Not at all!!”

Kanzaki shook her head back and forth as she trembled at a high speed.

Orsola either didn’t notice how Kanzaki was acting or her thought pattern had gone forward or backwards to somewhere else.

“By the way, doesn’t that long katana get in the way?”

“F-for me, one with a little weight to it is easier to wield.”

“My, my. And I thought its length had some religious meaning.”

“Oh, it does have a meaning from Japanese legend.”

Kanzaki was relieved that the subject had finally changed and she continued speaking while walking down the corridor with Orsola.

“The only reason there are a lot of religious katana is that the ruling classes of Japan held katana and other types of swords in high esteem. If they had held axes to that same esteem, there would be a lot more axes. It’s the same as how in some areas the people are proud of their fish and vegetables and in others it’s their kitchen knives and pots. It all depends on what people in that area find most important.”

She ran her fingertips along Shichiten Shichitou’s hilt.

“In Shinto, everything is based on the theory of the 8 million. In other words, it

is thought that gods reside in everything and therefore anything can become a magical tool. The Amakusa Church often uses this idea by creating spells out of the objects at hand. But because a different god resided in each object, a single object cannot be used for various different kinds of spells."

"Yawn…I am quite sleepy."

"!! You asked the question and you aren't even paying attention!?"

Kanzaki yelled in amazement, but Orsola merely rubbed her eyes and quickly headed into the dining hall.

Left behind, Kanzaki's shoulders drooped as she entered the dining hall as well.

It was a large room.

Originally, only about 70 people used it, but the recent arrival of the former Agnese Forces had added another 250 to that. The fact that there had been room for them was a good indicator of how much space there was.

There was no set time for Necessarius activities, so the nuns ate their meals at different times. Because of this, the dining hall almost never filled up.

But…

"I can't believe that whenever Orsola is in charge of the meal, every seat is full. Talk about only caring about yourself."

Kanzaki reached her table while still in amazement.

Agnese, Orsola, Lucia, and Angelene were sitting nearby. Seeing Lucia with her pointed eyes pulling on Angelene's cheek, Kanzaki guessed that the small girl with a bent back must have snuck some food before the meal.

"Bh-bhut I only want to ask Sister Orsola for her secret."

"Her secret? Don't be ridiculous."

"But I want to know how to get big breasts."

(…What are they talking about?) Kanzaki thought as she covered her face with

her hands in exasperation.

Meanwhile, Lucia and Angelene continued their argument.

“Sister Angelene. A nun does not need breasts. A nun is supposed to cut herself off from every kind of desire and breasts only bring the danger of tempting men. It is Sister Orsola and I who have the fault here.”

“Wah! You say all that, but still declare yourself as having large breasts!? I won’t let you draw the line as cruelly as that! And someone like you who complains about her breasts getting bigger even though you’d thought they’d stopped growing and saying they hurt wouldn’t understand how I feeghaah!?”

As Angelene was speaking, Lucia’s face had turned red and she pushed down on Angelene’s braided blonde head as hard as she could. As they struggled, the knives and forks on the table rattled.

Kanzaki gave them a warning as she watched on in utter amazement.

“Angelene. And you too, Lucia. It’s time for the pre-meal prayer. Quit making such a racket.”

But Angelene wasn’t listening.

She looked at an area a little bit below Kanzaki’s face.

“And the point goes to Japanese food!!”

“Enough with this sacrilegious conversation, Sister Angelene! And you, Kanzaki Kaori. If you’re a nun, put those filthy things away!!”

“They aren’t like this to draw attention to them!!”

Kanzaki shouted in return without thinking, but the humble (in both mind and body) nuns averted their gaze and clicked their tongues lightly.

And in that strained atmosphere, they prayed and started breakfast.

Nothing particular was made for breakfast in the women’s dorm. The day before, cards indicating what people wanted for breakfast the next day were counted and

then a single type of meal was made all at once in a giant pot.

But Orsola was skilled enough to make a number of meals all at once. She couldn't make hundreds of meals on her own, so a few dozen other nuns would help her. However, Orsola knew the recipes to a large number of foods and she was good at accurately instructing others.

So in front of Kanzaki was white rice and miso soup, in front of Agnese and Lucia was pasta, and in front of Angelene was French food.

Kanzaki muttered "itadakimasu", picked up her chopsticks, and spoke.

"Really, what's with that washing machine? First it took all the color out of the obi to my yukata and today it broke so easily. Academy City didn't send us a washing machine that would eliminate the spiritual effects equipped on our clothes, did they?"

"Ah. Ah ha ha. Let's focus on our food. Okay?" Agnese tried to change the subject with an overly dry smile.

Meanwhile, the tall Lucia and the bent-backed Angelene were speaking.

"Uheh? Sister Lucia, that much will hold you until lunch? The pasta only covers half your plate."

"Sister Angelene, you are taking too much food. What kind of menu is that? A nun does not need chocolate drink or ice cream with her breakfast. If you maintain a spirit of moderation and are thankful for the food with discipline and faith, a single plate of noodles will fill you up. You could even say that I am being blessed with too much."

"Hehh… Well, if you don't need all that, I'll eat it for you."

"!? Stop entwining my pasta around your fork, Sister Angelene!!"

As the large and small nun combo struggled, Kanzaki removed the bones from her grilled fish and sighed. From the way they had just been talking about breasts, it was hard to believe that those two had been pointing weapons and asking for their deaths while calling them heretics just a few weeks before.

(It seems one’s assessment of people can change given a chance…)

Kanzaki finished removing the bones from her grilled fish in an oddly solemn mood, popped open a small container and pulled out an umeboshi. No artificial dyes must have been used in it because it was more of a beige than a red.

And…

When Kanzaki looked up, Lucia and Angelene were looking wide-eyed in her direction.

“Wh-what?”

Kanzaki was taken aback and the two nuns whispered to each other.

“(…Sister Angelene. The Asian is about to eat something I’ve never seen before. Is that the ‘umeboshi’ from the country of the samurai I’ve heard about?)”

“(…I bet it’s necessary for an Amakusa spell. I’ve heard they have something called a ‘hinomaru bento’ there. It has something to do with imitating their flag.)”

“(…Does eating their flag have some kind of religious meaning? This could be our chance to learn about what peculiar direction Amakusa spells have taken.)”

Kanzaki couldn’t decide whether to correct their misunderstanding or not, and Agnese nudged her shoulder.

Looking over, Kanzaki saw that Agnese’s eyes were fixed on her umeboshi.

“What does that taste like? Can I try one?”

“S-sure. I don’t mind… Wait, on your pasta!?”

Kanzaki was shocked to see Agnese put the umeboshi on top of her pasta that was cream-colored as she had already put white sauce on it. As Agnese mixed it around, the pasta turned to a light pink color.

Kanzaki’s face paled as she saw that, but surprisingly enough Agnese smiled in enjoyment when she took a bite.

“Hm, this is quite fresh. It has a refreshing flavor.”

“Really, really!?” said Lucia and Angelene in excitement. But Kanzaki was the most surprised. Japanese-style pasta with soy sauce or mentaiko was one thing, but she doubted cream sauce with an umeboshi in it was actually good.

Orsola hadn’t been getting into the conversation very much and she had had her head tilted to the side for a while by that point. With a completely happy-looking expression she muttered something about wondering how many meters long her pasta was as she continued to spin her fork around in thin air. She was probably asleep. Kanzaki tilted her head to the side in puzzlement at the fact that Orsola had been able to make food this good while in a state like that.

And then…

“K-Kanzaki-san! Me, too! Me, too!! I want to try an umeboshi, too!!”

Angelene was yelling while leaning forward on the table. Looking down, Kanzaki saw that her main dish was a soft croissant. Kanzaki was about to ask her what exactly she was going to put the umeboshi on, but she suddenly stopped.

(No, I can’t give her the preconception that an umeboshi is eaten on top of something. She’s open to new things like Agnese. Once she has tasted an umeboshi, she should make her way to true Japanese food with no problem.)

“S-sure. I have plenty, so if you want to try one, go ahead.”

She consented humbly, but Kanzaki had actually dried them in the sun herself on the roof of the women’s dorm because she wasn’t satisfied with the commercial ones. Because she had been worried about not getting enough sunlight with London’s frequently changing weather, she had made a plastic greenhouse for them and had gone back and forth on whether she should just use magical light or if they had to be completely sun dried. The fact that people were praising them made her extremely happy on the inside, but she made sure she was a true Yamato Nadeshiko by hiding that feeling behind a calm façade.

Kanzaki took an umeboshi out of the container with her chopsticks and put it on a small plate. Angelene took it with a cheer.

Kanzaki examined Angelene's face to see how she would react to it.

"You put an umeboshi on something to eat it, right? I can actually be a bit weak to fruit pastes like jam and marmalade, though."

"Hah?" Kanzaki said as her eyes turned to dots.

She had a feeling there was a grand misunderstanding going in here, but she didn't do anything in regards to those fears.

"This isn't the same thing as an Eastern sweet, right? I think those are called 'wagashi'. I've been interested in them for a while."

Angelene popped the umeboshi into her mouth without any caution at all.

And directly afterwards…

Her eyes turned to X's, her lips puckered up, and she fell backwards in her chair.

She abandoned her meal and ran from the dining hall screaming something.

An umeboshi full of the history and techniques of the Amakusa Church was nothing like commercial ones.

Part 2

Once breakfast was over, it was back to battling the washing machine.

“Owner’s manual – check. A screwdriver and other tools – check. The warranty card just in case… Eh? The support center is in Japan? That means it’ll be at the international rate!”

Kanzaki was right at the line between being determined to finish and deciding to give up as she trudged along a hallway in the women’s dorm.

That was when one of the doors along the hallway suddenly opened.

Sherry Cromwell came out looking sleep deprived and scratching her disheveled hair. Her blonde hair looked like a lion’s mane and her light brown skin made her look wild. The sun had already risen high into the sky, but she was still wearing a black negligee.

She was holding a chisel and hammer for sculpting in her hands.

“…Oh, Kanzaki. Is there any breakfast left?”

“I see you got so absorbed in sculpting that you forgot what time it was again. There’s no breakfast left, but Orsola’s in charge of the food, so if you clasp your hands and beg I’m sure she’ll make you something.”

As she spoke, Kanzaki looked over Sherry’s shoulders and into her room.

Sherry had rented out two rooms in the dorm. One to sleep in and one to work in. There were plenty of people that rented out multiple rooms to help manage their spiritual items, but renting a room for something that was no more than a hobby was quite rare.

Sherry’s room was labeled as the “Sculpture Room”, but there were no sculptures in it. There were only piles of the shattered pieces of former sculptures in the four corners of the room.

Except for a statue of a small boy in the center of the room.

It was a life-size marble statue with “Ellis” carved into its pedestal.

“That one was a failure, too.” Sherry muttered when she saw where Kanzaki was looking. “Even though it’s a failure I can’t bear looking at, I just can’t bring myself to destroy it.”

Sherry was almost speaking to herself and Kanzaki only knew that Ellis was the name of the golem Sherry used. Because of this, Kanzaki asked a simple question.

“So that isn’t the name of the spell you use?”

“…When I was naming it, that was all that came to mind.” Sherry responded sulkily. “I was creating a puppet to protect me and when I got to the stage where I had to give it a name, his was the one that came to mind first. I’m aware it makes it look like I’m clinging on to regret.”

Sherry chucked the sculpting tools she was holding into the room, locked the door, and headed for the dining hall without saying another word. Kanzaki didn’t know the details, but Sherry’s back looked somehow smaller than usual.

(Well, asking further wouldn’t accomplish anything. Sticking my head into other people’s business doesn’t necessarily lead to the path of salvation.) Kanzaki was the bearer of the magic name meaning “reach out the hand of salvation to those with none” so she was itching to do something, but she forced herself to remain silent.

“O-oh, there you are, Kanzaki-san…”

Now Angelene was half-running toward her. She had gotten up and left halfway through breakfast, but now she was holding what almost looked like a tube of toothpaste in her hand for some reason. It most likely contained ganache.

“What is it, Angelene? Where have you been? Oh, I think your breakfast was already cleared from the table.”

“Kh… N-no, that doesn’t matter. I don’t mind. That just means lunch will taste even better.”

“Then, how about you try another umeboshi at lunch. This time you can actually put it on rice and…”

“No thank you!! I’m not going to have any more of that devil’s food you call an umeboshi! It messed up my mouth and not even drinking hot milk made it go away! That’s why I’m eating chocolate now!! All my admiration for Japan was destroyed in an instant!”

Hearing that disheartened Kanzaki Kaori, but she gracefully controlled her emotions like a true Yamato Nadeshiko so there was no outward change. Or so she thought. In reality, her shoulders drooped.

“Well, I won’t force you to try… So, what did you want me for?”

“O-oh, that’s right. Um, well, I’m not actually the one that wants you…”

“Oh, were you asked to pass a message along to me? Is it from Agnese?”

“N-no. It isn’t a message. You’re needed as a representative of the dorm… Um, um, and it isn’t from Sister Agnese.”

“Lucia then?”

“Um, well, it isn’t from Sisters Lucia or Orsola. Nor is it from Sisters Catarina or Agata. In fact, it isn’t from anyone in the dorm.”

“???”

(This is the Anglican Church’s women’s dorm, but there’s someone else here?)

Kanzaki tilted her head to the side in confusion.

“Umm, I think she said she was…” Angelene tilted her head to the side a bit, too. “Oh, right. Sasha. It was Sasha Kreutzev.”

Part 3

Sasha Kreutzev.

She was an official member of the unit of the Russian Orthodox Church that

specialized in magical combat, “Annihilatus”. They specialized in the annihilation of non-human things that “shouldn’t be”. To do so, they would not hesitate to use magic that had been completely banned ever since Rasputin’s corruption of the government. It wasn’t rare for them to destroy everything in the area their target appeared in leaving no remains behind and making major changes to the terrain. Because of this, there were currently limitations in place on entry to the country by people from certain nations that wished to protect the cultural properties there.

One of their magicians would not be quite as strong as a magician from the Anglican Church’s Necessarius in a one-on-one battle, but by equipping herself with saws and hammers and other British-made spiritual tools of torture, Sasha compensated for that. She looked like a short blonde girl, but with the 7 tools around her waist, she was an almighty magician who could deal with any kind of situation by changing her tactics accordingly. She had great value as an agent of her organization due to her ideal level of skill.

Kanzaki had seen a different side of her on the coast of Japan, but it was best to think of that as a different “her”.

Sasha Kreutzev was an agent of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Why was she in London and why was she at the women’s dorm of the Anglican Church?

It was unlikely she was sightseeing or had gotten lost.

The Roman Catholic Church and Academy City were in an explosive situation, so Kanzaki could naturally sense a political scent to Sasha’s visit.

She could have been there for a negotiation, to discuss something, to try to work out a deal, or even to give a warning.

As Angelene brought her to the dorm entrance, Kanzaki braced herself.

“My first answer: I am lost.”

“Ehhh!?” Kanzaki yelled out without thinking.

Seeing Kanzaki’s astonished face, Sasha nodded slightly.

“My second answer: Thank you for the excellent reaction.”

“You were kidding!?”

Kanzaki didn’t remember Sasha Kreutzev being the kind of person who made jokes, but then she remembered that that was a different “her”.

“My third answer: As I am sure you have guessed, I have come here as an envoy of the Russian Orthodox Church. But I would like to add that this is not a formal meeting on the part of my church. As I will be expressing my personal feelings, this is no more than an unofficial conversation.”

It seemed this wasn’t a clear display of hostility from the Russian Orthodox Church.

Kanzaki let her guard down slightly.

“I see… Well, I doubt you want to stand the whole time we talk, so come on in.”

“My fourth answer: Thank you for-…”

Sasha’s words cut off suddenly.

When Kanzaki turned around to look at her, Sasha was moving her right hand behind her.

It looked like her fingertips were shaking unnaturally.

“My first question: There are magical defense on this facility, are there not?”

“No… There is some bait here meant to lure in anyone within England who wishes to bring unrest, so those kinds of defenses are purposefully left off.”

“My second question: Then are there other magical operations occurring within this facility?”

“Well…” Kanzaki thought for a second. “Now that you mention it, some of the people in the dorm cast storage spells to protect their spiritual items. But I wouldn’t think very much magical power would seep out to here from that.”

Kanzaki wondered if this had anything to do with Sasha’s trembling fingers.

Meanwhile, Sasha nodded slightly as if to show she understood.

“…My fifth answer: It is nothing. Let us go to somewhere where we can talk.”

She brought her small hand to her chest and breathed deeply before looking forward again. Kanzaki may have been mistaken before, because her fingertips looked the same as ever.

Kanzaki moved to the side as if to show Sasha the way and wondered where she should take her. This was the women’s dorm so there weren’t any areas for taking visitors. But since Sasha was a special envoy of the Russian Orthodox Church, she couldn’t exactly take her to a private area like her own room.

It seemed the dining hall was the only option.

“But why are you here? There are representatives of the Anglican Church at St. George’s Cathedral.”

“My sixth answer: Vasilisa…That is, a superior of mine whose personality I would rather not discuss, is headed there. She has entered England for a conference there and I have entered as her aide.”

Kanzaki, Angelene, and Sasha walked down the hallway to the dining hall.

“Then your being here makes even less sense. If you’re the aide, you should be by the Russian representative’s side during the conference.”

“My seventh answer: There are various circumstances on the Russian side. It may sound rude to you on the British side, but I personally feel my being here is more important.”

“…”

Given the unstable state of the world, a Russian magician wouldn’t have been able to get into England easily, so Sasha had used the conference as a means to get in.

This seemed suspicious, so Kanzaki brought her guard back up.

“(…U-um, Kanzaki-san.)”

Angelene was tugging on Kanzaki's pants.

"What is it, Angelene?"

"(…Do you know her? And…she has a fairly *unique* way of dressing.)"

Sasha Kreutzev's shoulders gave a large twitch.

She was wearing only a revealing straitjacket-like collection of black belts as innerwear with a red cloak over it.

"Shh!" Kanzaki said as she held her index finger to her mouth.

"(…There are different cultures out there. That outfit must have an important meaning in the Russian Orthodox Church.)"

"(…E-ehh? Really? It just looks like something a weird middle-aged man you run into on a deserted street at night would be wearing…)"

"(…Angelene! Don't say that. You'd get mad if someone mocked the way you expressed your faith, wouldn't you!?)"

Sasha was trembling slightly, but she never reached the explosion point. There were only fragments of sentences occasionally escaping her lips such as "I'm not dressed like this because I want to be…", "The Russian Orthodox Church isn't a collection of perverts…", and "I will kill Vasilisa….".

As this was going on, they reached the dining hall.

Breakfast was over, but a number of people – mostly former Roman Catholic nuns – were sitting at the tables chatting. They had no set time they had to get to work, so when they were on standby they did nothing else.

"Hm?"

Sherry turned to look at the three who had entered while stuffing her mouth full of a ham and lettuce sandwich Orsola had made with whatever food she could find (Orsola really must have been tired because the contents of the sandwich were sticking out from the bread).

“Someone’s wearing a swimsuit and it isn’t even summer.”

A vein showed up on Sasha’s temple. She must have been overly shocked by having someone wearing an extremely revealing negligee say that. She muttered “I will kill Vasilisa. I will kill Vasilisa. I will kill Vasilisa.” under her breath in a frightening way.

Kanzaki put her index finger to her mouth to keep Sherry from saying anything else and spoke.

“U-umm. This is Sasha Kreutzev. She is an agent of the Russian Orthodox Church and she’s come here to have an unofficial discussion.”

Everyone in the dining hall was listening to Kanzaki with the possible exception of Orsola. She was so tired she was walking to and fro between the tables while holding a fancy tea set on a tray and wobbling back and forth.

In her place, Agnese who was holding some playing cards responded. Across the table from her was Lucia’s poker face, Catarina was next to her with tears in her eyes, and Agata was diagonally across staring at her own cards. Agnese turned from them and looked at Kanzaki.

“Is the unofficial discussion this Sasha wants to have about her wanting to flee her country and take refuge here?”

“I see. It looks like this is a literal case of escaping ‘with only the clothes on one’s back’. Well, you’ll be fine here. Don’t worry.”

In response to Agnese and Lucia’s words, the sides of Sasha’s mouth fell. In response to this, Kanzaki Kaori gestured frantically telling them not to bring up her clothes.

After pulling herself together, Kanzaki offered Sasha a nearby seat.

It seemed Orsola’s sleepiness had finally faded and she brought over a cup of black tea.

Sasha sipped the tea to moisten her tongue and spoke.

“I have a third question for you all today.”

Her words seemed to spread throughout the entire dining hall.

And as they did, the atmosphere turned solemn.

“Which side do you intend to take in the war occurring between the Roman Catholic Church and Academy City?”

Part 4

War.

That was a word that none of them could ignore anymore.

Up to that point, wars had occurred in areas marked by national boundaries, but this one was different. There were no national boundaries in a conflict between ideologies. It was possible that every part of the world could suddenly become a battlefield. There were no countries that could be considered safe and no areas that could be considered to have impenetrable defenses. There was even a danger of conflicts breaking out within a single unit.

“My eighth answer: This is a nice city.”

Sasha was looking out of a large window.

“To explain further: There are not very many demonstrations being carried out by the Roman Catholic Church or the science side in London. Incidentally, Russia is in a very tense state at the moment. There is a fear of sudden riots even during the day, so more and more stores are closing their shutters.”

The Anglican Church and the Russian Orthodox Church were both state religions, but the people of the country were not required to follow that religion.

Because of this, there were plenty of Roman Catholic believers in Russia. And as for science, there were very few people who did not rely on it by that point.

Kanzaki was reminded of these facts before she began speaking.

“But why did you come to us? We are only one part of the Anglican Church and a single organization is forbidden to act completely on its own judgement. If you want to know what actions we will take in this forthcoming war, you need to go to St. George’s Cathedral and talk with the Archbishop…”

“My fourth question: Is that really true?”

“What?”

Kanzaki, Agnese, Lucia, Angelene, Sherry, and the others displayed suspicious expressions at Sasha’s words. Except, that is, for Orsola who looked like she was nodding off.

“My fifth question: Do you really intend to continue obeying the Anglican Church during this war?”

“…”

The words of the Russian Orthodox Church rang throughout the large dining hall.

“To explain further: Kanzaki Kaori and Agnese Sanctis are in a symbolic position as members of the former Amakusa Church and the former Agnese Forces respectively. And most of the other members of Necessarius are in the Anglican Church in order to accomplish their goals instead of being in Necessarius because they are a part of the Anglican Church.”

Her words were blunt. She had clearly done at lot to prepare for this meeting beyond simply gaining entrance to England.

Sasha continued.

“To explain even further: In the Russian Orthodox Church’s opinion, the Roman Catholic Church and Academy City are currently about equal when it comes to strength in a war. Therefore, third parties like the Russian Orthodox Church and

the Anglican Church can have a great effect on the outcome. The Russian Orthodox Church has no real interest in this war. We do not mind who wins, but we would like to ally ourselves with the victor so as to have the upper hand when the war is over. We need to know what the British side will do in order to have a more accurate opinion."

The Anglican Church was a major influence in the magic side.

It did not get along with the Russians because of the differences between the denominations. At the same time, it had a special pipeline with Academy City.

It was difficult to predict which side this major magic organization would choose.

Not to mention that the Anglican Church also had a number of people like Kanzaki and Agnese who belonged to smaller organizations that were affiliated with the church. Individuals could be the same. Stiyl would go anywhere and do anything for this one small girl and it was unclear what side Tsuchimikado was really on. Sherry was a genuine member of the Anglican Church, but due to problems between factions, she had tried to kill Index, a member of the same organization.

The key movements in this great war that would shake the world were completely unreadable.

It was certainly worth looking into.

(…Or maybe she's trying to throw a stone to guide our movements in an easier to understand direction.)

Kanzaki Kaori thought about the meaning of the war after hearing Sasha's words that could be interpreted as telling them to split onto different sides.

She had already removed herself from the Amakusa Church, but that didn't change the fact that she still needed to protect them.

And the Amakusas had fought against the Roman Catholic Church when rescuing Orsola Aquinas. Since there were only 50 battle-ready Amakusa members, it was next to impossible for them to survive without the protection of the Anglican Church.

At the same time, the former Agnese Forces had truly become an enemy of the Roman Catholic Church ever since the Queen of the Adriatic incident. They would gain nothing by leaving the Anglican Church during this war.

And then there was the fact that, in the past, Kanzaki Kaori had had a number of people important to her saved by Academy City…no, technically it was by a single boy who lived there.

(My heart tells me to side with Academy City…)

If the Roman Catholic Church won this war and their influence spread throughout the world, the Anglican Church would lose some of its weight and the Amakusas and the former Agnese Forces could be destroyed. Thinking of that, she wanted to side with Academy City.

(But that's the science side…)

If Academy City won, it would still be a very dangerous situation. It was possible the science side would ride the wave of victory and annihilate the magic side all at once. Then it wouldn't matter how much influence the Anglicans had. All magical powers throughout the world would be destroyed and that would include the Amakusas and the former Agnese Forces.

This war had a great meaning behind it.

If the war ended in a standard winner/loser fashion, it seemed like the Anglican Church would lose quite a bit no matter who the winner was and who the loser was. That meant the Archbishop wouldn't let it end it like that. She must have some kind of plan prepared.

Sasha and the other Russians were worried about which direction England would take.

To get through this, they had to do a lot of planning.

And how England would act played heavily into that planning.

(Kh… It looks like we have no choice but to fight in this war.)

All this thinking with only the benefit of one's own side in mind was hard for

Kanzaki Kaori.

(I have the magic name I do because I hate thinking like this, but I can't see any way of avoiding it right now…)

Depending on the situation, she may have to turn her sword on the "enemy".

She would have to have a set "enemy" and she would be fighting with the intent of killing instead of saving.

It was possible she would destroy the peaceful life that boy and girl had grasped with their own hands.

Sasha Kreutzev was here for the answer to one main question.

Which side would they choose in this war?

(I…)

Kanzaki instinctually gritted her teeth.

(I…!!)

"You don't have to worry about that," Orsola Aquinas suddenly said even though she had been dozing off up until then.

Everyone in the dining hall turned toward her.

It was unclear how much of the conversation she had heard, but her words were quite definite for someone who hadn't been listening.

"My sixth question: What do you mean by that?"

"I mean exactly what I said," she responded immediately.

She hadn't thought too deeply about it. Or perhaps she didn't feel it was something she needed to worry about.

"Whatever happens, what we need to do remains the same. If there are people asking for help, we will reach our hand out to them. If there are people in pain, we will heal and comfort them. If there are people who do not wish for conflict,

we will arbitrate for them. Isn't that right?"

"My seventh question: This would not be a problem if we could do that. To explain further: The war that is starting is not so simple a-..."

"Even so," Orsola cut off Sasha's words. "What we need to do remains the same. Just because a war has started is no reason to deny those who are asking for help. Nor is it a reason to whip those in pain or to force a sword into the hands of those who do not wish to fight."

"…"

Sasha Kreutzev remained silent after hearing those decisive words.

Orsola Aquinas was an expert in spreading the Christian Churches in pagan lands.

She had been subject to hostility from all sides and ideological violence countless times and yet she did not carry a weapon. She was a person who accomplished what she felt she needed to do with her words alone.

"Do you understand the meaning of the small power we have?"

It was for that very reason that her words here held weight.

At least more weight than the words of someone like Kanzaki who picked up a weapon whenever a conflict broke out.

"That small power allows us to continue forward without giving in when faced with a dispute that seems inescapable or it seems inevitable a life will be taken. That power gives us the opportunity to save the future of our allies, to not have to deprive our enemy of their future, and to all gather here in a single building afterwards. …'He' had no power and 'he' did not have the proper background, but he was able to do it. So why are we not able to? If 'he' can save so many people on his own, just think how many more we can save if we work together. There is no meaning in giving up. If you want to find meaning, it is crucial that you never give up."

Everyone listened to her speak.

Agnese looked the other way and Angelene grabbed onto Lucia's clothes. Lucia placed her hand on her small colleague's shoulder and Sherry narrowed her eyes. The other nuns did pretty much the same thing. They all were reminded of a certain boy while listening to Orsola's words and their thoughts moved on from there. They began thinking about what path they should continue on from there.

Kanzaki was naturally reminded of the first time she had run into "him".

That boy's fist had been sliced by her wire-attack, Nanasen, he had received blows all over from Shichiten Shichitou's scabbard, and yet he still stood his ground before a Saint. She remembered what he had said at that time.

"Then what are you doing here!?"

She tried to…

"If you have that much power, if you have that nigh-almighty power…then why are you so powerless…?"

Kanzaki Kaori tried to remember what her expression had been.

"Then…" The one person there who did not know that boy cautiously asked a question. "My eighth question: How will you all act?"

"Do not place the decision on me alone. Everyone has their own things that they must do. But," Orsola Aquinas smiled as she spoke, "I personally do not at all see this in black and white terms of winning and losing. There is a third option. If we do not prepare the kind of happy ending where no one is defeated, we will not be living up to what 'he' would want."

A war was about to break out and yet she was able to say such a shining and pure thing and mean it.

Part 5

Sasha Kreutzev left saying that she had been unable to get a solid grasp of the situation.

Afterwards, Kanzaki Kaori leaned against the back of the dining hall chair she was sitting in and stared at the ceiling.

(What I should do…)

The circumstances were different for her than for Orsola. She was one of the fewer than 20 Saints in the world. Her battle potential was similar to that of the nuclear weapons the science side had. Once it came to war, she wouldn't be able to stick with only words; she had the ability to truly accomplish something and thus she would be made to act directly.

(How can I carry out the meaning carried in my magic name…?)

She didn't have enough power to decide the overall winner of a large war, but she could completely alter the progress of a local part of the conflict.

And it was possible that that small victory could start a chain reaction that could affect the war as a whole.

There was a mountain of options spread before her eyes.

Kanzaki was troubled by this war not because she couldn't do anything but because she *could* do something.

(The power that only I possess, huh? That certainly is an arrogant way of thinking. I'd rather be getting a headache from that washing machine than this.)

She sighed.

Her benevolent spirit made the burden of her power as a Saint seem even greater. Essentially, she felt that she was better off than those around her due to her powers so she had to save even more people in exchange. Depending on one's viewpoint, this could be taken as her looking down on others. It was quite an ugly character trait.

To Kanzaki, people like Orsola or "that boy" who were powerless (Kanzaki felt

that that way of viewing of them needed work) and yet reached a hand out to others were almost too bright to look at.

“Kanzaki-san. What is it?”

As Kanzaki had been slowly thinking, Orsola had reentered the dining hall.

Kanzaki found it hard to meet her gaze, so she continued to stare at the ceiling.

“…I’m embarrassed by my own lack of discipline. It scares me to think that someone this immature was the leader of the Amakusas even for a brief time.”

“The road to maturity is not an easy one. It’s simple enough to want to understand the teachings of the Lord, but truly understanding that path is extremely difficult. In fact, I feel that I said something rather immature before.”

“You did? I mostly agreed with what you said. Just because there’s a war doesn’t mean you should stick to a path of killing. I completely agree.”

“Hee hee hee.” Orsola giggled for some reason.

Kanzaki looked over at Orsola while still leaning back in her chair.

“Mostly, you say?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Oh, nothing. That just means that you feel there is a different reason to fight. It seems Tatemiya-san and the others were right on target when they said that there is someone you love in Academy City.”

Kanzaki fell backwards in her chair.

She yelled while still lying on the floor.

“Wh-why would they be saying something so inaccurate!? What’s going on in the Amakusa Church!?”

“My, my. It was when Knight Leader nervously showing up in Japantown with a single flower in one hand and the substitute pope, Tatemiya-san, was speaking with him. The Knight Leader wanted to invite the Amakusa Priestess to a dance, but Tatemiya-san told him it wasn’t going to happen and they got into a heated argument. In the middle of all this, Tatemiya-san shooed Knight Leader away with his hands telling him that the Priestess prefers to lead younger guys than to be led by older guys and then mentioned what I said earlier. It has become something of a legend.”

“B-but that’s completely untrue! And why has that been passed around as a legend!! Dammit, Tatemiya Saiji! There are better excuses you could have come up with!!”

“Also, during this incident, another Amakusa member, Itsuwa-san, was heard to comment ‘I-I have to do my best!!’.”

“Why are you saying that like you’re a news anchor reading from a teleprompter!?”

Kanzaki was making quite a fuss over this, but Orsola was being true to her habit of not listening to others. She smiled faintly, mentioned something about the stock of black tea, and headed into the kitchen.

Now that Kanzaki had much too late become aware of how the situation had spiraled out of control, she could do nothing but be dumbfounded and blush.

But then…

“Gyaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhh!!”

Now she heard Agnese’s scream coming from outside the dining hall.

“Agh! If it’s not one thing, it’s another!!”

Kanzaki stood up and ran out of the dining hall.

She didn't know exactly where the scream had come from, but she knew the general direction, so she intently ran down the hallway.

She spotted Agnese Sanctis sitting on the floor outside the changing room.

As Kanzaki approached, Agnese pointed towards the changing room while still sitting down.

"Th-the washing machine… The washing machine…"

An unpleasant noise came from Kanzaki's temple when she heard Agnese's broken up words.

It was that washing machine again.

It had caused a problem before breakfast and now it was causing another one before the previous one could be dealt with.

Her head was full of thoughts on the war and people saying she had fallen in love and now it was the washing machine again.

(Is that thing really some detestable high-tech AI spy sent by Academy City!? I can't imagine it would cause this many problems otherwise!!)

Kanzaki entered the changing room with enough intensity that she felt she would simply chop the thing in two with Shichiten Shichitou if it caused any more problems.

The bath was a large type that was rarely seen in the West and the changing room was large as well. She knew the washing machine should be in a corner of the changing room along with a scale.

She turned her gaze in that direction.

Academy City's useless piece of trash of a washing machine that had taken the color out of her yukata's obi and malfunctioned while washing a futon was…

Making a loud washing noise.

It was properly washing the futon that had been stuffed inside it.

“Wha-…?”

Kanzaki had trouble breathing.

The washing machine was sold as being quiet, so it was irregular for it to be making this much noise. That meant that it was forcing itself to move. It was over its designed maximum load and had been ordered to go through an operation far from its normal operating environment. Even so, it had endured and endured and endured and was finally carrying out its task of washing an entire futon.

(Amazing…)

All strength left Kanzaki’s body and she fell to her knees on the changing room floor.

Her feelings of anger had turned to ones of raging embarrassment.

(I was just reflecting on my own immaturity, and now this…)

That washing machine had had a giant futon there was no way it could wash stuffed inside of it, had nevertheless had its switch turned on, and had Kanzaki give up on it and leave. And yet it had been working on its own the entire time since. It had endured the pain and suffering continuing to do what it should and it had finally accomplished its supposedly impossible task. And yet she had been about ready to cut it in two…

The washing machine said nothing.

Its AI had no conversation functionality, so that was obvious.

But Kanzaki Kaori heard it nonetheless.

She heard the voice of the washing machine.

“Kanzaki-san. I did it.”

“~ ~ ~ ~!!”

Tears welled up in the corners of her eyes.

No words came to her. She merely threw Shichiten Shichitou aside and embraced the square body of the washing machine like it was a long-lost family member.

Chapter 4: A Drunk Mother's Circumstances.
The_Two_Leading_Roles.

Part 1

In Academy City, ten at night was relatively late.

This was because the city's trains and busses stopped running after all of the students were supposed to have left school. In some places, stores would close at that time too, so it seemed that the only stores open were ones geared towards adults.

Because members of Anti-Skill who functioned as both teachers and the security forces were patrolling the city, students who weren't prepared to get scolded would stay in their dorms.

For that same reason, Academy City was full of delinquents at night so a normal student could easily get caught up in some small bit of trouble if he went walking around then.

In one of those streets, the sound of a cane tapping against the ground could be heard.

It was Accelerator.

(Ahhh… Dealing with that leftover work kept me out pretty late…)

He was not returning to Yomikawa Aiho's apartment.

He was registered as a first year at Nagatenjouki Academy, but he wasn't going to one of that academy's dorms either.

He was heading for a building that was referred to within Group as the “Nap Room”.

It wasn’t required for members of Group to sleep there. Apparently, Tsuchimikado Motoharu attended a normal high school and lived in a student dorm and Musujime Awaki was living as a freeloader with some nosy woman teacher. Unabara Mitsuki hadn’t said anything about his living arrangements, but it seemed he had his own place. As long as they didn’t do anything too noticeable in the open, they had some freedom as to their basic activities. At the very least, the higher ups hadn’t complained about where the Group members were living.

Accelerator didn’t care where the other members were or what they were doing, but he was sure they had to be thinking the same thing he was. Simply put, he would have no problem if the organization called Group was destroyed so long as it didn’t damage him any.

(That would make this all easier.)

It was past the point where they could conspire together and change things for the better.

“…Tch. I guess I’ll stop by a convenience store and buy some coffee…”

The can he was currently drinking was pretty much empty so he started walking in a different direction to go get a new one. He headed towards the convenience store on the first floor of a nearby building as if he was being attracted by the various fluorescent lights that made up the scenery of Academy City at night.

“Uhh…Uhhhhnnn…”

A voice that sounded like someone talking in their sleep came from next to him.

But there shouldn’t have been anyone there. After all, there was only a red mailbox there. And that metal mailbox that made one question its usefulness in that age of email was clearly not a bed.

And yet…

“U-ugyahh…I don’t feel so gooood…”

A strange drunk woman was clinging to the mailbox's support post like it was a dakimakura and rubbing her cheek against it.

She looked like she was a college student. She was wearing a simple shirt and slender black slacks, but they were probably some expensive brand. Also, a small handbag that couldn't have held anything more than a wallet had fallen to the ground a little bit away from her. Everything about her was screaming "Attack me, dumbass!". She seemed so "welcoming" in that way that it made you not want to try to help her.

Accelerator was about to ignore her and head into the convenience store, but..

(Hm? Her face looks familiar…?)

He suddenly stopped.

He looked closer at that drunk college student's face. He looked at her shoulder-length light brown hair and the well-proportioned lines of her face. Her eyes were closed so he couldn't tell, but he easily guessed that her eyes would be filled with excess energy. Her height and proportions were completely different, but oddly enough *that girl* still came to mind.

She obviously couldn't be part of Last Order's family.

Clone espers did not have families.

(…Who is she? Don't tell me this is just a coincidence…)

Accelerator couldn't help but be curious and he was staring at the woman's face from close by.

"Yaaawwn… Yes, yes. I'm Misaka Misuzu-saaan…"

Just when he saw her eyes suddenly open, the drunk grabbed onto him. She moved slowly, but Accelerator used a cane.

They both fell down onto the dirty road.

The woman was grabbing him around the waist, but she didn't seem to notice.

“My hobbies are number theory and studying. My special skill is swimming and my boobs are 91 cm… Oh, whoops. I’m married. C’mooon, don’t touch me so familiarly, it’s rude to papa.”

As she spoke, she pushed Accelerator to the side and sat on the ground a bit away. For a second, he felt the urge to shoot her in the head, but…

“Huh…? Where’s the Dangai University database center? Hey, white guuuy. Do you know?”

She was completely drunk.

She probably would have said the same thing to anyone, be it the chairman of the board of directors or the President of the United States.

(Th-this is so fucking stupid that I’d be an idiot to pay her any heed. I just need to go and buy my coffee. Fuck dealing with that woman.)

Accelerator stood up while supporting his weight on his cane and wiped the dirt of off his pants with one hand. He then sighed and started to leave.

“Heeey, don’t be like that. Don’t ignore me, white guuuy…”

The drunk grabbed on to his ankles.

Accelerator fell again with a yell.

The strange drunk climbed on top of him and spoke.

“Hey, white guuuy. I’m the kinda person that’ll kiss anyone – boy or girl – if they’re younger than meee.”

“Quit blathering on about meaningless shit!!” Accelerator yelled back without thinking, but then realized what he had done.

Now that he had actually acknowledged that lonely drunk’s existence, he saw a most unpleasant smile appear on her face.

“Like I said… Do you know where the Dangai Universtiy database center is? Misuzu-san has to do some studying theeere. I’ve got reports piling up after allll.

Bwaaah…”

The strong stench of alcohol slowly surrounded Accelerator.

“Why the fuck would I know that!? Go call a taxi or something!!”

“Ahhn. How do I do thaaat?”

Luckily, a taxi happened to be coming by. Accelerator had been pushed to the ground and had someone clinging to him, but he still managed to get his hand in the air and wave it vigorously.

The taxi slowly stopped and the driver, a middle-aged man, jumped out.

“A-are you okay!? Did something happen!?”

“…If anything else happens here to annoy me, I’m going to beat everyone here to death…” Accelerator muttered in a low voice.

He shoved the drunk off of him to the side. He ignored the strange woman saying something about the taxi and yelled at the taxi driver telling him to deal with her. He finally managed to walk off. He no longer cared about the convenience store or a can of coffee. He just wanted to get as far away from that drunk as possible.

Academy City’s strongest esper was human and it seemed there was at least one thing he had trouble dealing with.

Part 2

“I’d say croquettes qualify as a type of nabe meal,” Kamijou Touma explained to Index who was walking next to him.

They had left the sukiyaki restaurant, split away from the rest of his classmates, and were headed back to the dorm. They had stopped by a convenience store, so they weren't with the guys who lived in the same dorm building (And he didn't want anyone to find out Index lived with him, so they had needed a time delay).

"See, it's the most delicious when you put a cassette stove on the table, put an oil-filled pot on that, and put the ingredients in the oil with breadcrumbs already on them. It can take a while to cook, but you can fill that time by eating other food until the croquettes are finished frying."

"But doesn't any food taste better right when it's made?"

"Well, yeah, but…"

"Ah!? Then food is the best if I eat it all while you're making it right in front of me!? Wh-what a discovery!!"

"Screw that!! You would deprive me of getting even a single bite of that delicious food!?"

Kamijou gave the same excellent objection anyone would, but Index and the calico cat did nothing but sulk and mew.

Kamijou was casually counterattacking by saying he didn't feel much like cooking so they would only have frozen food for breakfast the next day when he saw a taxi stopped on the road they were heading along. Its yellow blinker was flashing, the back door was open, and the upper body of a woman who looked college-aged was sticking out onto the ground.

A middle-aged man who appeared to be the driver was arguing with the woman who was partially sprawled on the ground.

"I told you not to open the door and get out like that!"

"What'd you saaay!? Are you challenging the All-Japan Half-Open Door Alliance!"

"Yeah, yeah. I'm sure you're the only member of that whatever alliance, so quit talking about it and please get back in your seat."

“That’s it… Now I’m not getting back in no matter what. Heh hehhh…”

This conversation where both sides seemed to be talking about completely different things reached Kamijou’s ears.

(Wow. What a horrible customer!!)

Kamijou seriously began thinking about going down a different street.

It wasn’t the conversation that woman was enjoying; she was the kind of person that enjoyed having people look after her. If he got wrapped up in dealing with her, he would definitely continue getting wrapped up in trouble until she sobered up in the morning.

Since Kamijou was indelibly stained by misfortune already, he was the last person who should deal with someone like that.

“Hm?” The drunk woman said as she turned her head towards him.

Her lower body was still inside the taxi and her upper body was still on the ground.

“Ahh ahh ahhhh! It’s Kamijou-kun! It’s Kamijou-kun!!”

Kamijou shoulders gave a large jump.

(Why does she know my name!?)

Kamijou looked at the drunk again and realized it was Misaka Misuzu who he had met during the Daihaseisai. She was the mother of Mikoto, that electrified middle school girl.

“…Well, I guess this is about right for someone in her family.”

That was a rude thing to say, but, when Misuzu heard it, a relaxed smile appeared on her face.

“The earth sure has a lot of gravity, doesn’t iiit?”

“Hah?”

“Misuzu-san doesn’t need anything ellllse. I’ll just go to sleep here. Nighty niiiight.”

That was followed by what really sounded like the breathing of someone asleep, so Kamijou was unsure if he should wake her or not.

But then Misuzu’s eyes suddenly opened.

“Oh, no. I haven’t done my stretches or taken off my makeup! Dammit. All this work I have to do to keep my skin healthy. I am a mother of a child after all!! Ugh, I’m gonna vomit!”

Kamijou swore to himself that he would never let Mikoto drink any alcohol.

It was against the law for minors to drink anyway.

Meanwhile, the taxi driver was looking towards Kamijou with sparkling eyes as if to say “I-I’m saved! Someone who knows this drunk has shown up!!”.

Also, Misuzu seemed to have changed her target from the driver to Kamijou and tried to get up while having her lower body inside the back of the taxi and her upper body sticking out onto the road.

“Oof, oof. I-I can’t get uuup…”

It seemed she couldn’t get up, but she was adding in a lot of unnecessary motion so she looked like a seal in an aquarium.

Kamijou didn’t want to approach her, but he couldn’t just leave her, so he carelessly approached. That was when Misuzu grabbed onto him with all her might.

“Yaaaay!! I got a young guuuuy!!”

“Gwoooooaaah!?”

If it had just been a hug, his heart would have been throbbing, but it seemed Misuzu didn’t slack off on exercising because a creaking noise started coming from the area of his backbone.

“Why was Misuzu-chan wandering around so laaate? Bwaaah…”

“Gwaah! You reek!?”

“Huuhh? You don’t find a mother who stinks of alcohol and has drunk eyes sexyyy?”

“None of those were positive traits!! H-help me, Index!!”

Kamijou called for help, but Index was staring at him with cold eyes and showed no sign of trying to help him. The cat in her arms must not have liked the smell of alcohol because it was struggling trying to get away.

Misuzu stared vacantly at Index.

“Heeey, who’s she? Introduction pleeease.”

“H-hmph. I see no reason to tell someone like you my name.”

“What was thaaat!? If you don’t introduce yourself, I’m gonna stick my fingers up this guy’s noooose!!”

“Wah wah!! Index! I’m Index!!”

And like that, the Misuzu Typhoon blew in getting the upper hand of even Index.

“Hey, heeey. Do you know where the Dangai University database center is?”

“Hah?”

“Oh, you know…The storage facility that has a whole buncha information on programs dealing with AI and operational software…”

“N-no, you don’t have to describe the database center to me. Um, Dangai University is…”

“Oh, right! Let’s exchange phone numbers and email addresses!”

“That was sudden!”

“You’ve exchanged them with Mikoto-chan, riiight? I want in, too. My address is…”

Misuzu carefully lined up some numbers and letters of the alphabet. Mikoto had worked hard and set up a large plan which involved getting a new phone to accomplish this and her mother had done it in all of 3 minutes.

“Okay, okaaay. I’ve put your number in the ‘Friends’ category.”

“Why does talking with you remind me of Orsola’s conversational pattern…?”

Kamijou suddenly felt exhausted and finally managed to tear off Misuzu who had been holding him like a vise.

“Actually, why are you here? You wouldn’t have been able to get into Academy City without permission.”

“Yes, yeees. Misuzu-san is a college student, so I have to turn in a report. But the data for it is only in Academy City, so I had to come aaaallll the way here.”

“So that’s why you need to get to the database center… It’s not surprising this is the only place with a database on AI.”

It seemed the taxi driver was making his escape, but Kamijou glared at him to get him to stop.

“And I thought I’d go see Mikoto-chan while I was heeere. But apparently Tokiwadai’s girl’s dorm is strict so I couldn’t. You can’t treat parents like that!”

“…Well, no one’s going to believe some drunk who comes saying she’s the mother of a student there. And you don’t look like a mother at all.”

“Oh, this guy just casually complimented meee. But it’s not like that. I work haaaard to stay like this. I swim around in an indoor pool each week and put on a moisturizing cream after taking a bath. And if I slack off even a bit, it all falls apart. Kwaah! I hate you teenagers with perfect skin even though you don’t do anything!!”

Misuzu started acting violently, but the alcohol must have been taking even more effect because her footing seemed unstable. This was good because Kamijou was able to grab the taxi driver who was trying to escape again and had him help get Misuzu into the back of the taxi.

“Heeey! I’m not done yeeeet!!”

“Yeah, yeah. We can finish this conversation some other time when that alcohol’s had a chance to leave your system.”

“Dammit! You’re treating me like a child!!”

Misuzu tried to continue, but Kamijou waved his hand and the taxi driver drove off with a look on his face that said, “Is she really going to be able to pay me?”. Kamijou heard the sound of the car’s exhaust in the distance and sighed.

“Now then…”

Kamijou suddenly felt the presence of someone seething with anger behind him and shuddered.

The source of this presence was of course the nun holding a calico cat.

“How am I going to get out of this one?”

Part 3

Kamijou ended up having his head bitten magnificently and he unlocked the door of his dorm room while rubbing the back of his head.

“Nn…It’s a bit chilly in here.”

He turned on the lights in the room, grabbed the remote to the air conditioner, and turned it on. Index ran over to the TV and sat down while Kamijou headed for the unit bath and used the panel next to the tub to turn on the automatic hot water mode. Today was the day to wash the cat, so he prepared a wash basin.

(It’s nice not having to make dinner or wash the dishes…)

Kamijou raised his arms to stretch and left the bathroom. He was full, so all that was left was to soak in the tub, brush his teeth, and go to bed. It was just too nice. It tempted his heart towards eating out more often, but, according to the account data on the finance app on his phone, he’d have nothing to eat but water

and salt for the second half of the month if he did that.

He had started to wonder how much the nabe had set him back and had started to operate his phone with his thumb when the phone suddenly started ringing.

When he changed the mode, he saw Misaka Mikoto's number on the screen.

Kamijou hit the talk button.

"??? Do you need something, Misaka?"

"When are you going to reply to that email!?"

(Email?) Kamijou tilted his head to the side in confusion.

"Hmm, I can't quite remember what you're talking about…"

"!? How careless can you-…"

Mikoto was yelling something, but it sounded like her voice was becoming more distant and then the call suddenly ended. Kamijou looked at his phone's screen, but he still had a strong signal.

(…Misaka must have lost her signal.)

Kamijou dismissed it and went back to the finance app.

He plopped down in front of the glass table in the center of the room.

"Index, you shouldn't sit so close to the TV."

"B-but the 'Thinking Power-Increasing SF Health Quiz' is reaching its climax!!"

"…There have been a lot of that kind of science and brain related quizzes lately, haven't there?"

(Well, some of the stuff comes up in Academy City classes.)

Kamijou didn't really care about the quiz show, so he looked over at the cat on its back basking in the heat of the air conditioner.

“Hm. If you’re not doing anything, I guess I’ll wash you first.”

He took out a bottle of animal shampoo and a mini-sponge shaped like a cat’s head, but the cat must have sensed something because it ran to hide in the kitchen as if to say, “I hate water and bubbles!!”. It was probably trembling in fear while hiding between the fridge and cupboard.

Now it was covered in dust so Kamijou was going to have to wash it even harder.

But then…

“Hm?”

His phone started vibrating.

It wasn’t from Mikoto this time.

The small screen showed the number that had been newly recorded just a little earlier.

Part 4

Misaka.

That was what that drunk woman collapsed in the road had said.

(…Is it just a coincidence? No.)

Accelerator walked alone down the dark road with his cane and thought.

The provider of Last Order’s genes was Misaka Mikoto…but that wasn’t her. So

that must have been her older sister. If she was in Academy City, she may have been some kind of esper, but he hadn't heard anything about that. But since he didn't really care about others, he didn't know very many details about other espers.

However, there was one thing he found odd.

(Her clothes. Elmo, Az, Scale, Losib, and her perfume is a new Zero Plus product…Wait, aren't those all for teens? Well, she was still covered in brand name clothes and all from companies outside of Academy City. The fact that not a single thing came from here is odd.)

It was conceivable that someone would order an entire outfit from a brand they really, really liked, but that drunk's clothes were all from different brands. The shirt, the slacks, the belt, the shoes, and the handbag were all different as if she had thrown a bunch of things she liked together. It didn't look like she was particularly picky about the brands she wore.

But then one would expect for there to be at least one thing from within Academy City.

Since there weren't any…

(It's possible she came from outside.)

While he thought, Accelerator was purposefully choosing paths people rarely went down even though not many people were out at night.

(Then why is she here? She said something about needing to go to the Dangai University database center, but would they really let someone in for that while preparing for a war? They're not only thoroughly checking the background of any guests, but they're doing it to the delivery workers too. So does that woman have some other reason to be here?)

A reason.

A reason for someone in the Misaka family to be here at this time.

It could very well have to do with the original, Misaka Mikoto. Or…

(…It could have to do with that kid.)

“Tch,” Accelerator clicked his tongue and pulled his cell phone out of his pocket.

He opened the address book and moved the cursor to the entry only labeled as “Entry 3” and pressed the call button.

It was the number of his fellow Group member Tsuchimikado Motoharu.

He put the phone to his ear and it connected without even ringing.

“Accelerator. Do you need something?”

A polite male voice answered. But Accelerator’s eyes widened when he heard it. It wasn’t Tsuchimikado Motoharu’s voice and the speech pattern was completely different.

(So they cut in on the call.)

“You bastard. I’m assuming you’re the guy in charge of Group.”

“I can answer any questions you might have.”

“Tch. …I’ve got nothing to ask you. I can handle my own problems. So quit commanding us like you’re our fucking guardian. You’re gonna get your eyes gouged out.”

“Oh, I see. Well, that’s too bad. There was a matter I was hoping I could inform you of if you weren’t busy.”

“Ah?”

“It’s about Misaka Misuzu-sama. Although, I suppose you would need more than just a name.”

“…”

Accelerator looked around.

Nothing about the night-time street seemed out of the ordinary.

(Did someone give them the information or are they watching from a satellite…?)

“And who is this Misaka Misuzu? Is she related to Railgun?”

“Yes, she is. And this is perfect timing, things are just starting.”

(What?)

Accelerator frowned.

With a boom, a sudden explosion lit up a certain part of the city with a red light.

It was fairly distant. The sound came a few seconds after the light.

Accelerator turned in that direction with the phone still pressed against his ear.

An unnatural light was flickering near the building-covered horizon.

“That Misaka Misuzu-sama applied for permission to use the Dangai University database center, so we have attacked it. She is the only one using it and a few private guards have been confirmed to be there, but, well, it’s within what we’re allowed to do. All of the main data is backed up over the network, so there is no need to worry about any losses there.”

“Attacked?”

“Yes.”

“…Who is this Misaka? She isn’t some professional agent, is she?”

“As you may have guessed, Misaka Misuzu-sama is Miss Misaka Mikoto’s mother. Her background check was clean. So you need not worry about that.”

(Her mother?)

Accelerator recalled Misuzu’s face and a dubious expression appeared on his face.

But what bothered him more was…

“Why are you attacking her mother? And her background check was clean? What the hell are you doing?”

“An ordinary person can be dangerous in her own way. Now I’m getting to the heart of the matter I mentioned before that I wanted to inform you of.” The voice on the phone spoke quietly. “Do you know what a recovery exercise is?”

“It’s that thing that’s been happening a lot lately. Academy City might be becoming a battlefield, so parents are coming to take their kids somewhere safe.”

“That reasoning itself is nothing more than foolishness brought about by a complete lack of understanding of the situation of this country’s defenses, but it is still a problem. Having a great number of students leave Academy City is a problem for a number of reasons.”

“…”

Why was that a problem?

Did they not want to let go of the students who could fight a war for them?

Did they not want their research samples to be leaked outside of the city?

(That isn’t it.)

He was speaking with the person “above” Group. Someone like that wouldn’t have a normal opinion. If it was a problem for *them*, it had to be a problem relating to some deeper plan.

For instance…

There were the various pieces of things behind the scenes he had caught a glimpse of on September 30th. Things like Kihara Amata, Hound Dog, that giant winged monster, the virus injected in Last Order, and that silent attack on Academy City.

“Misaka Misuzu-sama is a parent attempting to carry out a recovery exercise. We know that she is not intentionally causing a problem *for us*, but an accidental problem is still a problem. It has to be stopped here.”

That drunk's face came to the surface of Accelerator's mind for an instant.

She was an irritating woman, but that was no reason to drag her down into the world of darkness.

But it was too late.

The explosion had already occurred. Misaka Misuzu had most likely been blown to pieces in the first blast.

However, the voice over the phone spoke.

"You will join in too, Accelerator."

"What?"

"I'm saying you can earn quite a bit here. Skill-Out was hired to take care of this, but…their performance is lacking. It had been concluded that bringing a problem like this to Group was too dangerous from an exposure point of view, but that thinking appears to have backfired. If you assist us here, your points will go up quite a bit. It will be the first step towards making up for the losses on September 30th. You want to pay back the around 8 trillion yen you owe as soon as possible, right?"

"…"

Accelerator thought about it.

If the person on the other end of the phone wasn't screwing with him, Misaka Misuzu was still alive.

"No, thanks." He responded. "Skill-Out? You really want me to do odd jobs along with those Level 0 fuckers? And I don't need to bow down to accommodate someone like you. I'm not here because of that debt."

As he spoke, he checked the choker-style electrode on his neck.

He had had a bit of fun earlier, but the battery still had plenty of time left.

It was more than enough to take care of one little Skill-Out group.

He was going to save Misaka Misuzu.

That was his natural decision. It was the same feeling he had had during the incident with Kihara Amata. A tiny life was in danger from an unreasonably large power. It almost made him laugh how unpleasant a feeling it was. It made him want to beat the shit out of the people who brought about the situation. It reminded him of when he had fought for Last Order.

Even though he was of the darkness.

“Someone like you may not understand, but my life is my own. I don’t give a fuck what you expect me to do. *I* decide what I do. I’m not your tool. Got it?”

“Is that so? If you aren’t going to do the job, then just come on home.” The voice on the phone sounded a bit discouraged. “I’ll take care of your power until you make it back.”

The electrode on his neck gave a strange beep.

(Wha…t!?)

Accelerator hurriedly put his hand up to the switch, but there was no reaction. There was nothing more than a clicking noise. He couldn’t switch between normal mode and powered mode.

“You put something in my electrode!!”

“Oh, is there something you need your powers for?”

“Tch,” he clicked his tongue.

In order for Group’s technical team to improve the battery, his choker-style electrode had been confiscated temporarily, but they must have messed with its internal workings in that time. The person over the phone most likely had a safety device that he could freely operate remotely.

Don’t trust us.

Accelerator now had an idea what Tsuchimikado Motoharu’s words from earlier that day had meant.

“If you have no more questions, I’ll be going. Good night, Accelerator.”

The connection ended.

“Hmph,” Accelerator made an uninterested noise.

(Excellent. Now I feel like doing this even more.)

There was a villainous look in his eyes.

Accelerator put his phone back in his pocket and gritted his teeth.

(…All I can use is my handgun and I have about 50 shots left. I have no idea what Skill-Out has in regards to numbers or equipment, but I bet I can get that drunk out of there with this.)

It was a tricky situation, but at least it wasn’t as bad as when he had taken on Kihara Amata’s Hound Dog. Skill-Out could take on a normal esper with weapons, but they hadn’t had professional training.

The biggest problem was Misuzu.

The attack was already underway. A group of Level 0s – or rather, a group of delinquents equipped with weapons and self-defense items – would be enough of a threat for a normal person. It was possible she could even be killed before he got there.

“…”

For an instant, Komaba Ritoku’s face appeared in the back of his mind, but he ignored it.

He had no reason to be remembering a villain taking out-of-place actions.

He had made up his mind and he was going to charge in there.

That was all.

(Tch. I just need to get this pain-in-the-ass problem over with as soon as I can.)

The attack was taking place at Dangai University’s database center.

It was a few kilometers away. As he used a cane, he had no choice but to find a vehicle somewhere. As he headed for a major road…

The back of a certain boy dashed by Accelerator.

"…"

He recognized the boy.

In fact, there was no way he could ever forget him.

He had a medium build and black spiky hair and was clenching his right fist. He was talking with someone on his cell phone while heading toward the blazing site of the attack. It was obvious what he was going there to do. It would have been harder to not figure it out.

(That…bastard!!)

Either Accelerator was in the shadows or that boy was completely focused on the database center, because he didn't seem to notice Accelerator at all. If they had run into each other there, they probably would have gotten into a fight to the death. That was how strong an opponent he was.

Accelerator shook his head trying to refocus.

(Tch. This isn't the time for that. I need to destroy Skill-Out here. I don't give a fuck what those people "above" want. I have no duty to do what they say. I just need to think about how I can solve this with only 50 bullets.)

He gritted his teeth and started walking with his cane.

Misaka Mikoto's mother.

He had no reason to interfere with her life, but she still had a connection with that kid. A Radio Noise clone had no physical parents and Misuzu probably didn't even know about that small life that had been created, but there was still a connection between her and that kid.

The two would most likely never meet (it would be a problem if they did), but that didn't mean he should just let her die. That connection was probably

something that mustn’t be lost here even if neither of them would ever know about the other.

Accelerator was a villain.

However, he did not put restrictions on himself because he was a villain. He threw away the preconceived notions that an evil person could not save a good person or those who were not good people couldn’t advance along the righteous path.

(Now then…)

Academy City’s strongest esper came out to a major road, stared at the headlights of a taxi wandering around looking for drunk customers, and gave a thin smile.

(I’m not going to be doing out of character things with a serious look on my face. I’ll save her in the way that’s furthest from what one would call “saving”. There’s going to be blood everywhere.)

Part 5

A bit earlier, Misaka Misuzu was in the database center.

The center had a 50 meter dome-shaped building at its center and a number of rectangular structures around that. At first, Misuzu was in the domed building looking something up on a computer, but she was currently in one of the adjoining buildings.

This was because something unusual had happened.

First, there was an explosion so loud she thought her eardrums were going to burst. Next, all of the lights in the facility went out. There was auxiliary power to preserve the data, but only the computers were still functioning.

(Wh-what? What's going on?)

Misuzu was keeping her breathing quiet in a space about the size of 3 school classrooms in one of the buildings next to the domed facility. She was not happy.

It felt like her good mood from the alcohol had been blown away.

There had been a rather large fire along with the explosion, but it seemed to have been put out right away. On the other side of the wall – that is, inside the main domed structure – people were coming and going and the situation seemed to be quite irregular even for the ones who had caused the explosion.

"Shit, who forgot to cut off the security!? God damn it. We were supposed to get out of here after the first blast!!"

"What time is it!? If the automatic report was sent in, we've only got 5 minutes!"

"No, it's just the independently deployed security to protect the computers that's up. The normal security was taken out."

"So it's just the fire alarm, huh? Well, we still don't have time. Okay, let's find that woman."

Voices like that were flying back and forth.

From the sound of the voices and the manner of speaking, they must have been boys in middle or high school. There were somewhere from 10 to 20 of them. She didn't know any details about what they had, but the clattering of metal was enough to make her cringe in fear. Since they had caused an explosion, they probably had guns and bombs.

(Woman. They're going to find a woman? W-was there anyone here but me?)

She had a feeling that she had been the only one using the facility at this time of day and that the guards had all been men. And from the way they were speaking, they weren't here to rob the place or to destroy it; they were here for "that

woman”.

(No. It has to be me. I’m the only woman here! What’s going on!?)

Misuzu leaned back against the wall and slid to the floor.

The room seemed to store the substitute processors; it was lined with metal shelves almost like a library. But instead of thick books, the shelves had a large number of motherboards in clear cases on them. The CPU’s were liquid-cooled instead of air-cooled, so there was no sound of fans. Instead, blood vessel-like tubes were running all over the room.

In the room darkened due to the fluorescent lights being out, the red and green access lights flickered.

(Th-the exit. Where’s the emergency exit…?)

She looked around, but couldn’t find a door that looked like an emergency exit.

She couldn’t run away. Misuzu accepted the fact that it was all over if she was found and felt a bit excited. Perhaps her drunkenness had come back in an odd way, because it was a strange feeling. It was like the uplifting feeling one felt just before a marathon. She had thought her drunkenness had been knocked out of her, but there was some left. In this situation, it would be best if she was fully sober, but it wasn’t so easy to switch over.

(What’s going on…?)

Misuzu pulled her cell phone from her pocket.

There was a 3 digit number in the most recent entry of her call history. It was the emergency number for the city’s keepers of the peace, Anti-Skill. She remembered having called even in her drunkenness. She had called just after the attack and a man with a polite manner of speaking had answered. The boys strutting about the main domed facility were afraid of an automatic report, but Misuzu had put in her own report. It had been a few minutes since then, so Anti-Skill should be showing up before long.

But for some reason there was no sign of them coming.

(…Why?)

Misuzu stared down at the call history.

The number there was correct. She was sure she had properly contacted the Anti-Skill station. But no one was coming. Anxiety crept into her heart. Was that really Anti-Skill? Who had that oddly polite man been?

(Why? Why won't they come!? I called. I did everything right! So why does this have to go badly for me!?)

The trembling in her fingertips increased.

Her fear had been diffused by her drunkenness, but it finally reached her core.

It was all over if she made the slightest noise and yet she wanted to forget it all and scream.

(I can't do this alone. I can't do this alone. I'm cornered all alone. A conversation. I don't care what about. I don't care who with. I just need to get this out before it explodes out on its own.)

She opened her phone's address book.

For someone reason her husband's face didn't come to mind at a time like this. She could call some third party outside of Academy City and get them to report this to the police, but for the most part Academy City had extraterritoriality, so the police couldn't intervene. (Technically, they had their own "regulations" not their own "laws", but most people viewed that as really nothing more than a method Japan used to keep its pride as a nation.) Because of this, she had to contact someone inside the city.

But she hesitated to call her own daughter. That was most likely due to the last of her pride as a mother. If she showed weakness to her daughter here, she would probably never be able to name herself as the parent again.

She needed someone within Academy City she could contact right away.

And it had to be someone other than her daughter.

Only one person fit those criteria.

(Ha ha…)

Misaka Misuzu operated her cell phone with her thumb.

In order to at least slightly relieve the great pressure in her heart that felt like it was crushing her, she called a certain boy.

Part 6

When all students were supposed to be back from school, the trains and busses in Academy City stopped.

“Damn it!!”

So Kamijou had no choice but to run down the dark streets. He started seriously thinking about getting a scooter license as he intently ran towards the Dangai University database center.

At the same time, he practically yelled into the cell phone pressed to his ear.

“Misaka-san. You said they have weapons, right? They’re probably a Skill-Out group. If it was a group of normal espers, they would rely only on their powers!”

“I’ve never heard of this Skill-Out.”

“Basically, they’re an armed gang. Think of them as a group of delinquents with dangerous weapons!”

He could finally see the silhouette of the facility.

As he ran, Kamijou realized that the flames he had originally seen were gone. Just as Misuzu had told him, the database center's automatic firefighting system was functioning.

"Why are those delinquents targeting me?"

"I don't know!"

Kamijou thought it might have something to do with Mikoto…but then he realized something.

"Misaka-san, have you called your daughter?"

"Eh?"

"She's one of the only seven Level 5s in Academy City! She'd be a lot more help than Anti-Skill! If you haven't called her yet, you-…"

"Wait!!" Misuzu interrupted him with more force than she'd spoken with up to that point. "I won't call Mikoto-chan! I don't care if she would be helpful here. If I got her wrapped up in my own problem, I could never look her in the eye again!!"

Normally, Kamijou would have felt that that was just an optimistic view.

It sounded like the kind of argument one would give while reading the newspaper.

But Misuzu's life was actually being targeted.

And yet she still immediately refused to have Mikoto brought into the picture.

"…Understood."

Kamijou clenched his phone as he ran.

"In that case, I'll go. You're hiding in the 'Substitute Processor Storage Room', right!?"

"Eh? Wait…I didn't ask you to-…!!"

(That’s enough out of you,) Kamijou thought.

He was right in front of the database center.

The facility was adjacent to Dangai University, but the database center was about two sizes bigger than the university itself. He could hear sporadic gunshots and sounds of destruction coming from within the domed silhouette. Perhaps due to the initial explosion, there were a number of people gathered looking on. And yet there was almost no Anti-Skill presence. They may have feared a sniper, because they were calling for backup while hiding behind their vehicle. But there must have been some kind of trouble, because there was an argument going on between the Anti-Skill members.

Kamijou ran past them and towards the facility.

The Anti-Skill members called for him to stop, but he paid them no heed.

(I’ve fought members of Skill-Out a few times in back alleys, but…)

One stroke of good luck in this bad situation was that the search inside the building left Skill-Out’s focus on the outside lacking. This meant he wasn’t going to get shot at while heading through the plaza that had no cover.

(Basically, I’ve only ever run away or hidden around a corner and counterattacked. This may be the first time I’ve gone in on the attack like this!!)

He entered through the main entrance that had had all its glass broken out and complained to himself about how much the situation sucked.

Part 7

Hamazura Shiage was pissed.

The original plan had been to approach the facility in a vehicle stolen under the cover of darkness, fire 8 of their handmade incendiary rockets, and run off. They had a rough sketch of the facility so they had known where to shoot their rockets in order to block off all the exits and have a good chance to fill the area with smoke.

The first failure had been that 3 of the 8 rockets had misfired.

And then the other 5 had been easily extinguished by the database center's automatic firefighting system shortly after igniting. The explosion had screwed up the structure of the building, but not enough to utterly destroy the building as if the outer walls had been made of soap bubbles. Since they hadn't been able to use their primary weapons of fire and smoke, the target was probably still alive.

Because of this, Hamazura and the others couldn't leave. They had to kill the target themselves.

Also…

"Have you *still* not found that woman?"

Their client had only given them a photo of her face and the only real fact about her they knew was her name. If she managed to get out of the facility, hid the characteristic aspects of her face with sunglasses and a wool hat, and mixed in with the crowd, they would have no way of searching for her. They had to take her out here. But…

"I asked you if you'd found her yet! God damn!!" He yelled in a throaty voice, but his equals in Skill-Out only glanced over at him and started searching again without opening their mouths.

That was right, his *equals* in Skill-Out.

A few hours before, their leader had been a man named Komaba Ritoku. As Komaba had disappeared, Hamazura had ended up in that top seat, but the new balance of power hadn't really sunk in yet. And he mostly had an atmosphere of dissatisfaction about the whole thing. After all, whenever the entire organization screwed up, the blame was shoved onto him.

The difference between Komaba Ritoku and Hamazura Shiage was clear. Komaba was the kind of person who naturally stood at the center, where all that Hamazura did was push jobs he didn't want to do on others. So no matter how easy a job it was, he couldn't shake an out-of-place feeling inside of him and he made the others feel uncomfortable.

Hamazura was pissed because he knew that.

It made him feel like not being able to find the target, not being able control this search properly, and everything else was due to the others betraying him and tripping him up.

He touched the piercing on his nose with a fingertip while looking pissed off. He had gotten it pierced just the month before, but it wasn't doing well. The slightest touch screwed with his concentration and sweat collected there.

"…We're fucked. We're totally fucked. Damn it, Komaba. You come up with this grand plan and then go off and die. What are we supposed to do now…?"

A number of boys gathered in front of a door.

It seemed they had found a room they hadn't searched yet. For the most part, there were no doors in the facility that locked. When the boys entered, a woman's scream came from within.

It looked like they'd found her.

None of them were using radios, so Hamazura had to give his instructions to the others who were searching himself. He felt more like he was doing odd jobs than being the leader. He headed for the room a bit later than the initial group.

"This is the central dome. The target has been found in the Substitute Processor Storage Room. We'll take care of her here, so you prepare to withdraw. Bring the vehicle around."

He expected some half-hearted reply as opposed to something like "Yes, sir!", but…

"Gah!? Hey, you! Wai-…Ksshhshshhshshhh!!"

He didn’t know what to make of the words and the horrible static hurt his ears.

And then he heard 2 gunshots from somewhere in the facility.

(Anti-Skill? Tch. We took too long!)

Hamazura watched the target being dragged from the room by the back of her neck and thought about what orders to give over the radio.

“Heeeellllloooo, you fuckers.”

Hamazura’s shoulders suddenly twitched.

Even with the horrible sound quality of the radio, he could tell. This clearly wasn’t one of his comrades. He could tell because a voice that sounded like metal being rubbed together wasn’t something you heard every day. And whoever it was wasn’t trying to disguise their voice in the slightest.

“Listen up all of you. I’m going to be giving you a nice day trip to heaven. Oh, and it’s quite a nice one, too. You’ll probably like it so much you’ll never want to come back. I suppose I’ll start by giving you a nice near-death experience.”

After speaking, the radio cut off.

And then…

A succession of gunshots pierced Hamazura’s ears.

Part 8

Kamijou Touma had his back pressed up against a corner of the passageway.

He was holding the rectangular piece of bulletproof glass that had been taken out of a window frame in his hands. The heavy piece of glass weighed somewhere between 7 and 10 kg and was about a meter across.

He had found it inside the facility, so its bulletproof functionality probably wasn't that great. After all, the glass in the main entrance would be the strongest and it had all been broken in the attack.

Nevertheless, it was better than nothing.

It wasn't unusual for Skill-Out to be armed with handguns.

He felt that was at least safer than going in after sticking manga magazines down his shirt.

(…)

A man holding a stun gun was collapsed unconscious at his feet. He had hidden until the man got near and swung the bulletproof glass so the stainless steel frame hit the man on the bridge of the nose. The man had fallen backwards like he had slipped on a banana peel and ceased moving.

Kamijou had already taken out four Skill-Out members in that fashion.

If he was going to fight with enemies who had weapons, the rule he had to follow was to not even give them a chance to attack. If they both had time to prepare, he had already lost. But if he could keep them from using their weapons, he didn't have to fear their weapons. Whether it was a knife or a handgun they were using, that remained the same.

(If they were moving in groups of 2 or 3 this tactic wouldn't work. Thank god they're idiots. Every single one of them is wandering around on his own. Someone needs to teach them how to use their numbers effectively.)

He picked up the stun gun.

He was making sure to take the weapons away from the Skill-Out members he defeated, but that was more to make sure they couldn't use them again than to arm himself.

Either way, he couldn’t exactly use other weapons while holding the bulletproof glass in both hands.

“Now then…Where’s the Substitute Processor Storage Room?” Kamijou mumbled while picking the giant piece of glass back up.

The center of the database center was the main domed facility and there were small 2 or 3 story adjoining buildings around that.

Skill-Out was clearly gathering in the main facility, so Kamijou was using the passages linking the smaller outer buildings to circle around.

There were some buildings that only connected to the domed facility, but Kamijou hadn’t come to a dead end yet. He started heading for the next building thinking he would try to go all the way around using the linking passages.

Bang! Bang!!

He heard gunshots.

“…!?”

For an instant a chill ran down his spine and he thought he had been too late, but this sounded more like the kind of disturbance that came after poking at a bee hive. Misuzu didn’t have a gun of course. So it must have been someone else returning fire.

(Is it Anti-Skill? Or is there fighting between different Skill-Out members? Well, whatever it is, this is my chance!!)

Every time Kamijou came to a corner, he would carefully check around it and only move to the next building when he had made sure no one was there.

But before long he came to a dead end.

More accurately, he came to a point where the only path led to the main domed facility.

(Agh. I had a feeling it was going to come to this! Well, I can’t just stop here!)

He ran along the passage and approached the door leading to the central dome.

He held his breath, stretched out his hand, hesitated, and then slowly touched the doorknob.

With the delicacy of someone defusing a bomb, he slowly turned the knob. He heard the small click as the latch moved. A thin line appeared between the door and the door frame.

He peeked inside.

A great number of business desks with computers on them were aligned in concentric circles like tree rings. The facility's lights were out, but there was a dim light covering the room so the monitors must have been working.

Four or five boys were gathered on one side of the domed building.

And a woman who appeared to be Misaka Misuzu was being forced to sit in the middle of them.

They were about 10 meters away, but the boys must have been fairly high up in the Skill-Out ranks because they were all armed with handguns. If he carelessly approached them, he would be turned to Swiss cheese.

(…This situation is almost laughably hopeless. How am I supposed to save her like this!?)

The boys appeared to be arguing. Apparently, there was a disagreement over how to deal with the firefight that had started. One side wanted to just kill Misuzu and get the hell out of there and the other side wanted to use her as a hostage.

The pro-killing side kept pushing their guns against Misuzu's head and the pro-hostage side kept pushing them away from her. At this rate, they could end up accidentally pulling the trigger and killing her without meaning to.

"Damn it…" Kamijou muttered and stepped back from the door.

(There are 4 or 5 of them. All of them have guns. I can't just yell and run in there.)

He checked the weapons he had taken from the Skill-Out members he had defeated.

He had a stun gun, a baton, and a long-range pesticide sprayer that could be used similarly to pepper spray. None of them were going to be much help here.

(This bulletproof glass takes both hands to carry. I have to choose between a weapon or a shield here…)

Kamijou looked back over at the giant piece of bulletproof glass.

(No, I can't get rid of the glass. I can't take out someone armed with a gun in one blow using a stun gun or pesticide. And after the first shot, they're sure to counterattack.)

This meant he had no choice but to go into that domed area with the bulletproof glass.

Kamijou used his palms that were damp with sweat to grab the glass again. He then approached the metal door and slightly opened it again.

The situation hadn't changed.

The 4 or 5 boys were arguing while surrounding Misuzu.

They were about 10 meters away, but rows of computer-covered desks were blocking the way.

He couldn't get to them in a straight line.

(That's pretty far away.)

But Kamijou noticed a dirty bag set down near the entrance he was standing in. It had been carelessly left on the ground right next to one of the business desks. It most likely belonged to one of the Skill-Out members. The zipper was open and spray can-like object and a handgun were sticking out.

(…)

Kamijou swallowed some saliva.

The bag was about 3 meters away, so he couldn't just reach out to it. To grab the gun inside, he would have to open the door farther and slip into the domed area.

(Can I make it?)

The facility's power was out.

The only light was the faint glow from the computers that were powered by the emergency power. He could barely see his own feet.

And the floor was covered in a thin carpet.

He couldn't exactly approach Misuzu and get her away without being noticed.

But if he only had to make it 3 meters…

He didn't know if he could actually shoot the thing, but he wanted to get that handgun.

He didn't have to make it all the way to Misuzu who was the center of attention.

He just had to make it 3 meters without being noticed.

(…I have to do it.)

Kamijou adjusted his grip on the bulletproof glass.

(I have no idea how to use a gun, but I should be able to at least threaten them if I have the same type of weapon they do. And I have this bulletproof glass. If things get bad, I have the advantage.)

Kamijou forced himself to find any little thing to be optimistic about, brought strength into his shaking legs, and placed his palm on the slightly opened steel door.

He slowly pushed forward.

The Skill-Out members showed no sign of noticing the slight movement of the door. Kamijou knelt down and headed into the domed area. He moved very slowly. The bag with the handgun in it was a mere 3 meters away, but it felt terribly far.

And then Kamijou’s eyes met with Misuzu’s 10 meters away.

“Eh?”

The very second she let out that noise without thinking, the Skill-Out members all looked his way.

Kamijou forcefully jumped under a nearby desk.

(That stupid woman!!)

He was trembling in fear and in real trouble. He may have hidden before they saw him, but they had clearly noticed the door standing open unnaturally.

He could tell someone was coming his way.

From under the desk, Kamijou couldn’t tell who was coming or how they were armed.

He could only hear the person’s footsteps approaching.

The space between footsteps wasn’t uniform. As the floor was a thin carpet, it was possible the person was stopping to check for footprints left on the carpet as he approached. Kamijou wasn’t sure if you could actually see the carpet clearly enough for that in the dark, but it was all over if this person could.

(Where’s that handgun!?)

Kamijou looked around the area while hiding, but the bag was on the other side of the narrow pathway made from the gaps between desks. He could probably reach it if he stretched out his arm, but he’d be found right away if he did.

Imagine Breaker would have no effect on their handguns.

He could feel a cold sweat covering his back.

If felt like his heartbeat was all he could hear.

(Shit…)

He felt like his teeth were about ready to start chattering together from his

trembling.

He was so tense that, the more he tried to silence his breathing, the more erratic it became.

He could hear the footsteps approaching from an area he couldn’t see.

(I have to do it. If I just stay curled up here, I’ll be found for sure. So I have to do it! I just need one blow. If I can get him to flinch back from that, I can pull this off. After that, I should be able to jump over to the bag with the handgun in it and counterattack before he can recover!!)

And then…

A large foot stepped down right next to Kamijou as he was kneeling down.

He couldn’t wait any longer.

If he did, his opponent would get the first attack.

“!!”

Kamijou inhaled deeply and sprang up from his position under the business desk. Along with his sudden rise, he swung the bulletproof glass to the side.

A large man with a nose piercing looked at him in shock.

An instant later, the man’s face disappeared from Kamijou’s field of vision. With a dull noise, the Skill-Out man’s body was knocked to the ground. The metal piercing must have ripped from his flesh, because it stayed oddly in the air just a bit longer.

One down.

But Kamijou was far from happy.

The bag with the handgun was right next to him, but he had forgotten to reach over to grab it.

And a boy with an oddly pale face was standing only a meter away from him.

(Two of them came looking for me!?)

Kamijou's body stiffened, but it seemed his opponent's did too. The student may have had a handgun, but he had no training or experience. He couldn't hide his shock at seeing his colleague suddenly taken out.

Kamijou heard a small metallic noise.

It was the sound of the nose piercing finally hitting the ground.

"…!!"

"…!!"

Kamijou and the pale boy both started moving, but something else happened first.

One of the men standing next to Misuzu aimed his gun at Kamijou. He must have brought up the handgun's hammer, because there was a sharp metallic noise. There were two of them next to Misuzu and one, a man with small chains wrapped around his arms and legs, held his gun with shaking hands. The other, a boy with numerous cuts in his shirt and pants, tried to stop the first, but the trigger had been pulled before he could.

"You've gotta be kidding meee!!"

Kamijou hadn't yelled that; it was the pale boy next to him.

However, there were numerous gunshots.

The thunderous roar and shockwaves from the shots made a tremendous noise.

Pain shot up Kamijou's wrists as he held the bulletproof glass. They hadn't been hit by the bullets; that was just from the shock being applied to the glass being transferred to his bones.

Meanwhile, the pale boy near Kamijou was knocked to the floor as if he had been hit by a hammer. When he noticed a dark red liquid coming from the boy's side, Kamijou gritted his teeth, but there was nothing he could do about it now.

He wasn’t sure if he should take cover behind something again, but…

(Shit! I have to put a stop to that…!!)

He kept the bulletproof glass in front of him and ran towards Misuzu…or rather, towards the two Skill-Out members standing next to her.

They were about 10 meters away.

Kamijou ran between the lines of desks.

But the next round of shooting came.

The bullets hit the glass, but it was enough to almost knock Kamijou to the ground. He just barely managed to regain his balance, but more bullets hit the glass and his hands slipped from the frame around the glass.

The large window fell to the ground with a metallic noise.

He didn’t have time to pick it back up.

He moved his gaze up from his hands that were covered in sweat due to pain and tension and saw two gun barrels staring back at him. This time it wasn’t just the man covered in chains; the one with the sliced-up pants didn’t hesitate either.

They were only 5 meters away.

Even with the fluorescent lights out, Kamijou could see the expressions on the Skill-Out members’ faces. He could tell one of them had sweat dripping from his nose to his lips. The trembling gun sight, the index finger moving like a rusted puppet, and everything else in that instant that seemed devoid of all sound was burned into Kamijou’s retinas.

Finally, Kamijou saw Misuzu’s face at the edge of his vision.

She was sitting on the floor while yelling something in shock.

Her lips were moving, but her words didn’t make it into Kamijou’s head.

He couldn’t move at all and it felt like time had stopped…

But then a high-pitched gunshot rang out.

Sound returned to normal.

In that instant, Kamijou seriously thought his heart had stopped.

But there was no 9mm hole in his body. He could tell that one of the two aiming at him, the one with the chains wrapped around his arms and legs, had been blown to the side. A dark red trail of blood followed him and he fell to the floor with no resistance.

Kamijou could hear Misuzu's meaningless scream.

The boy with the sliced-up pants turned his gaze to the side.

He turned in the direction of a different entrance from the one Kamijou had come in from.

Someone had shot the Skill-Out member from there.

"Y-you bastard!!" yelled the boy with the sliced-up pants as he held his handgun.

The feeling of paralysis finally left Kamijou.

Now that his freedom had come back to him like a rope hardened with glue being bent to regain its pliability, he immediately hid below one of the business desks.

Staying there, he yelled to Misuzu who was sitting in shock a few meters away.

"Get behind cover!!"

And yet Misuzu continued to sit in shock and showed no sign of moving.

"Misaka-san, get behind cover!!"

A number of gunshots drowned out Kamijou's voice.

He didn't know who had started this firefight, but a stray bullet could easily hit Misuzu like this.

(Damn it!!)

While hiding behind the business desk, Kamijou inhaled slightly.

(Can I do this…? Damn it. I have no choice but to go out in that!!)

He jumped out while still kneeling down low.

He ran 5 meters, and ran into Misuzu so as to cover her up while pushing her to the ground.

The gunshots continued.

“We’re getting out of here…”

There was no point in helping to bring this battle to an end.

“Hurry!!”

Kamijou grabbed Misuzu’s arm and ran towards an exit to the domed area as quickly as he could.

Part 9

When Accelerator entered the main domed facility, he started by shooting everyone holding a gun. First, he aimed his gun at one of the two men standing near Misuzu, a man with chains wrapped around his arms and legs, and casually pulled the trigger.

A dry gunshot rang out.

Seeing the man being blown to the side with blood spewing from his body,

Misuzu gave a short scream.

Humans were quite inconvenient.

No matter how big they got, a mere 9mm hole could take them out.

“Y-you bastard!!” the remaining Skill-Out member yelled and aimed his gun towards Accelerator.

However, he hid behind the steel door, let a few bullets come, and then sprayed back some bullets of his own.

The man who had cuts in his shirt and pants hid behind a desk, but Accelerator silenced him by shooting straight through the desk.

(Now then…The only Skill-Out member left is…)

“Him.”

Accelerator aimed and fired towards a dark figure that was dragging Misuzu by the arm towards one of the doors.

“Waaaaahhhh!?”

He heard a loud yell, but the bullets passed a bit to the side of the figure. Accelerator must have been worried about hitting Misuzu as she was next to the target. His aim had clearly been lacking.

In order to escape Accelerator’s aim, the figure continued running along with Misuzu. Apparently, raising his hands above his heads and stopping never even occurred to the guy.

“Tch,” Accelerator clicked his tongue. “Heh, now this is interesting… You’ve got guts to not give up on your job after all this.”

A smile sliced its way across Accelerator’s mouth and he aimed after adjusting his grip on his handgun.

“You’re just a fucking failure! I might as well scrap you here!!”

“Shut up, you asshole! What did Misuzu-san do!? You Skill-Out bastards just targeted an innocent woman and then started fighting amongst yourselves!! Just kill yourselves off and don’t bother us!!”

Accelerator heard a whining voice, but he concentrated on pulling the trigger instead of listening to it. But Misuzu’s back was in the way so he couldn’t fire.

And then the two had reached a different exit to the building.

Accelerator scratched his temple with the barrel of his gun.

(…Wait? You Skill-Out bastards?)

He thought about the words he had just heard.

(Did he think I was one of them? So he wasn’t one of them? I thought Misaka Misuzu was the only person that was supposed to be using this facility… Was he part of Judgment?)

It also bothered him that the guy hadn’t returned fire with a gun. Also, his movements hadn’t seemed like those of someone who had gone through Anti-Skill or Judgment training.

(It’s also odd that he knew Misaka Misuzu’s name… Well, I guess it wasn’t necessarily someone that knew her. Skill-Out may have been told the name of their target.)

For some reason, Accelerator fired his gun after them a few times and then headed further into the domed facility.

“Now then…”

He decided to chase after Misuzu and the figure that had run off with her.

He didn’t know who that guy was, but, even if the guy was with Skill-Out, he probably wasn’t going to kill her before he got to a safe place judging from the fact that he hadn’t just shot her and ran off. And since no counterattack came when Accelerator entered the domed facility, he really must not have had a gun.

Which meant…

(I just have to catch him and finish this before he gets off of the database center grounds.)

After deciding on that, he heard a number of footsteps approaching from a number of different directions.

They must have heard the firefight.

It looked like he wasn't going to be able to continue on easily.

(I need to fall back and take them out from there. These business desks won't block bullets.)

Looking for a place to fight, Accelerator looked around the area, but then his head suddenly stopped.

There were 3 pieces of trash collapsed in the domed area.

And yet there were 4 handguns on the floor.

Part 10

Kamijou and Misuzu left the main domed facility and headed to one of the smaller rectangular buildings via one of the linking passageways. They managed to get outside through an emergency exit there.

There had been onlookers gathered at the main entrance, but no one was out by this back entrance.

Kamijou spoke while still pulling on Misuzu's hand.

“We should find somewhere with a lot of people. There are onlookers and Anti-Skill out front, so we should be safe if we circle around to there.”

“Sigh. Why are boys always like this? I end up relying on you from the very beginning to the very end. As a parent, I’m supposed to be the guardian.”

Misuzu seemed a bit down, but it would have been hard not to be given what had happened. Kamijou certainly didn’t want to have to do all that again.

Because of this, he decided to urge her forward rather than criticizing her.

“Hurry. We managed to get outside, but there are still some of them left. If we get attacked again here, it’s back to square one.”

“I know, I know. Please just hold my hand and escort me.”

Hearing that, Kamijou suddenly became embarrassed. He started to let go of her hand, but Misuzu strengthened her grip.

It looked like she was teasing him, but she might have actually been afraid.

Kamijou continued to walk through the database center grounds.

The dome was about 50 meters in diameter and, even with the surrounding buildings, it wasn’t that big. It would only take a few minutes to walk around to the main entrance. The most dangerous part was getting out of the building, so he felt safer than his words had let on. Unless they were up against people who would kill the onlookers along with them, Skill-Out would give up on their own once the two of them made it to the main entrance.

But…

“Don’t move.”

A figure was standing blocking the path to the main entrance.

It was the guy Kamijou had hit with the bulletproof glass back in the dome. He must have come to shortly afterwards. Because his nose piercing had been ripped out, he had some dark red blood on him. He hadn’t really had a chance, but Kamijou really should have tied him up after knocking him out.

“Don’t move… Who the hell are you? Why did you have to show up at a time like this? Was that job a fake? Were we set up?”

Kamijou frowned at those words.

“Job?”

“What the hell kind of question is that? You know full well what I’m talking about. Komaba was killed forcing me to take command in his place. I had to clean up for him. I had no choice but to make it up to ‘them’ to keep us from being wiped out in the operation to take back control of the back alleys. …Shit. You were planning on using us and taking us out afterwards this whole time, weren’t you!!”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Kamijou tried to sort out the fragments of ideas this man was saying and responded.

“I came here because she called me. I don’t know what you’re imagining, but this isn’t that complicated.”

After hearing that, the man’s mouth fell open.

Then he gave a small laugh.

“Ha ha.”

The laugh held no amusement at all.

“So that’s what happened? We’re all done for here. We’re all going to get taken in by Anti-Skill and the guy at the center of it doesn’t even know what’s going on? My life, the life of Hamazura Shiage, is about to end. This is the finale... I thought I had at least gotten wrapped up in some conspiracy or been dealing with some genius tactician, but I wasn’t even being tricked? Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!!”

As he spoke, the man naming himself Hamazura brought his right hand behind his back.

He pulled out a retractable baton that must have been tucked into his belt and forcefully swung it out to full length.

“I can’t fucking stand it. I just need to beat someone to death.”

Hamazura headed straight towards them.

Kamijou pushed Misuzu to the side.

He was one beat slow because of that and heard something slicing through the air. It sounded like a tennis racket being swung and it was, of course, the sound of the baton.

“!!”

He immediately lifted up his left arm to protect his face.

The blow was aimed for his temple and it hit the bottom of his wrist with a dull noise.

A disconcerting groaning vibration went through his bones.

As Kamijou’s face twisted in pain, Hamazura jabbed his knee into Kamijou’s gut.

A loud noise like a drum being hit could be heard.

“Gh…ah!!”

Air escaped Kamijou’s mouth.

The shock caused the objects stuck into his belt to fall to the ground. These objects were the stun gun, the baton, etc. that he had taken from the Skill-Out members he had defeated.

(Damn it. Imagine Breaker is no help against a Level 0!!)

Kamijou gritted his teeth and quickly leaned over to pick the stun gun up from the damp ground. But…

“Did you really think I’d let you do that?”

Hamazura stomped full force on Kamijou’s hand as he grabbed the weapon.

There wasn’t enough time to just sit there feeling the dull pain.

“I know better than anyone how to use this kind of thing!!”

An unpleasant noise rang out.

While standing on Kamijou’s hand, Hamazura had used his other leg to kick Kamijou in the jaw.

“Bh…gah!?”

Kamijou’s consciousness wavered.

At the very least, he hadn’t bitten his tongue.

Kamijou’s body arced backwards and he fell to the ground on his back. Misuzu gave a small scream, but no one was paying any attention to her. Kamijou grabbed some dirt from the ground and threw it at Hamazura’s face.

“!!”

Hamazura protected his face with one hand so he wasn’t blinded, but he still flinched and took a step back.

Kamijou quickly got up to a half-risen posture and tackled Hamazura square in the gut. A loud noise like a door being smashed in came from somewhere near Kamijou’s shoulder.

Hamazura’s legs slid along the ground.

Even so, he did not fall backwards.

(He’s still…!?)

“Sorry, but I’m a Level 0,” came a whispering voice next to Kamijou’s ear.

Hamazura spoke at point-blank range while Kamijou almost looked like he was embracing him.

“To deal with espers in the back alleys, you need to build up a strong body. It’s fucking stupid really. We do the same thing as athletes, but no one praises us for it!!”

As he spoke, he slammed the bottom of his baton into Kamijou’s neck.

A sharp pain unlike any in the fight so far ran along Kamijou’s back bone.

He groaned and Hamazura brought the baton down 2 or 3 more times. Kamijou was swaying and about to fall when Hamazura grabbed his collar with his free hand.

He laughed at point-blank range.

“I see, I see. If you aren’t with ‘them’, then the deal with them is still good. So if I take the target over there’s dead body to them, they might still shelter us. Ha ha ha!!”

However, those words might have been a mistake.

A definite power could be seen in the light in Kamijou’s eyes.

“Try saying that again, dammit!!” Kamijou yelled from his bottom of his gut and aimed for the area between Hamazura’s chin and lower lip with his forehead. With a sound like a flower pot that had been dropped from somewhere high up, Hamazura’s neck bent backwards.

Kamijou then slammed his clenched fist into the top of Hamazura’s nose.

Hamazura’s body arced backwards and fell to the ground.

“Agaaaaahhh!!”

Hamazura rolled on the ground holding his nose and Kamijou tried to kick him. But the damage he had taken must have affected him more than he had thought, because his footing faltered.

“Shit…You have a sloppy way of fighting.”

Hamazura had managed to stand back up.

The previous head butt must have knocked one of his front teeth crooked, because his lips were stained red.

“Enough with the pointless resistance. Just hand over that woman’s body already. That’s the deal. Since Komaba failed, we have nothing left. We have to finish this job…”

Despite all his aggression, his words were oddly frail.

Kamijou frowned, but then figured it out.

He was from a group of Level 0s who gathered together out of fear of being unilaterally attacked by those stronger than them.

So no matter how strong he was, he wasn’t used to being punched by others.

Realizing that, Kamijou spat out his next words.

“Fuck that.”

As he spoke he realized his words were rather sharp.

“Enough about your job. I’m not going to be killed by someone with no reason to kill who’s treating it like their homework or something. What the hell do you think a human life is? Do you really believe it’s something that has monetary value? How can you be so fucking stupid!?”

“I have no choice. Level 0s like us can’t live without doing this kind of thing! We get mocked wherever we go and, when we make a place for ourselves, it gets destroyed in the name of making the area look nice. With things like that, what path other than preying on others is there for a Level 0!? Well!?”

Skill-Out.

A group of Level 0s created in the name of self-defense.

To do that, their circumstances must have driven them to it.

It was a spiral of violence and absurdity that remained hidden from public view.

But…

“…Don’t put me in the same category as you.”

“What?”

“I’m telling you not to put all Level 0s in the same category as pieces of shit like you.”

“You…Wait? What’s your power…? You haven’t used it at all…”

Hamazura wiped blood from his mouth and moved his eyes across Kamijou’s body as he spoke.

Kamijou ignored him and said what he wanted to say.

“Is there a place for Level 0s? Of course there is! Is there a path for them other than preying on others? Of course there is!! There are Level 0s all over Academy City. And they go to school like normal, make friends like normal, and just live normal lives! They don’t get mocked wherever they go. You’re the ones that are making a mockery of Level 0s by thinking that way!!”

“I see… So you’re the same as us…!!”

“I’m not the same. At the very least, I don’t act like you do. I don’t think my lack of power is any reason to attack those who do have power! I may be Level 0, but I have no intention of becoming a ‘minus’ who enjoys tripping up others!!”

“A minus?” Hamazura frowned as he repeated back what Kamijou had said. “You’re saying we’re minuses? Ridiculous. If anyone’s a plus, we are! Just because someone doesn’t have any power, is no reason to reject them. People like us in Skill-Out are 100 times better than those that have power but don’t help us at all!!”

“If that’s what you think, have you ever reached out your hand to someone who was asking for help?”

“…!?”

“If you can’t answer, then you’re the same. Fucking ridiculous. Who’s going to help someone who refuses to help people themselves? Who wants to be around someone who assumes they should be happy and never thinks about the happiness of others!? That’s where your problem lies!!”

“You people are such idiots,” Kamijou yelled.

This Level 0 was just too weak.

Not only was he weak, he gave excuses for his weakness so he would never grow stronger.

“If you had only used the strength it took to form Skill-Out and used it to help those weaker than you, things would have changed for you!! If you had only used that strength you used to fight back against powerful espers to help those in need, the people of Academy City would have accepted you!! I shouldn’t have to tell you this kind of thing!!”

“Shut the fuck up!!” Hamazura’s face distorted as he yelled. “Our Level 0 leader, Komaba Ritoku, lived like that and he died earlier today. He died while trying to protect the weak! In the end, it just isn’t that simple for us. When the dropouts in the back alleys try to do that kind of thing, we just get laughed at!!”

“I see. But that guy must have had something you don’t. I’ve never seen this Komaba guy, but he must have lived in a much wider world than you! Isn’t that why he stayed and fought to the end!? He wouldn’t have called the people he was protecting ‘the weak’; he would have called them his ‘comrades’! Was that Komaba really getting laughed at from all sides? He actually fought to the death for them. If he cared for his comrades enough to protect them like that, he, unlike you, must have been loved by his comrades!!”

“Fuck that…”

Two words seeped from between Hamazura’s lips.

His words were like a pool of filth overflowing.

“You’re mocking us. You’re a Level 0…You don’t have a power…and yet you’re still mocking uuuuuuusssss!!”

Hamazura brought up his baton and ran forward on shaking legs.

Kamijou Touma clenched his fist.

He was no longer afraid of that guy.

Hamazura had been revealed to be not much of a man.

“The reason people mock you has nothing to do with your lack of a power. I’ll show you that now.”

Even though Misuzu tried to stop him, Kamijou stepped forward.

Ignoring the incoming baton, he merely clenched his fist tighter.

“This is the difference between you and me! You can do something about that boring illusion of yours on your own!!”

A thick noise rang out.

Baton and fist hit their targeted faces, blood flowed from split foreheads, and they both lost their balance.

But only one of them fell.

The other would surely not fall.

Part 11

Kamijou wanted to go back to this dorm and sleep, but Misuzu said he was bleeding too much to ignore, so he ended up having to call an ambulance. It was a bit pathetic, but these medical fees and hospital expenses were a major reason his finances were in such a bad state.

At the moment, he was being taken to the ambulance on a stretcher. Misuzu was standing with a white-helmeted rescue worker when she suddenly looked over at Kamijou.

“It seems Academy City really isn’t safe. Although, I suppose it’s the same in any city. I wonder if there’s anywhere in this country where a parent can raise her child without having to worry.”

The noise of the stretcher’s wheels was so loud, Kamijou could barely hear her.

“…The truth is, I came here to take Mikoto-chan away.”

Even so, those words rang oddly clear in Kamijou’s ears.

Misuzu closed her eyes partially.

“Things are getting dangerous with that war starting after all. They said on the news that Academy City was safer than any other city in the country, but I could just take her overseas, right? Well, leaving my college studies would be a problem, but you could say it would just be an extended break from school. I don’t care if I have to repeat the same year again. I’m not ready to quit yet though, so I was serious about having a report I need to get done.”

After saying all that, she smiled.

It seemed to come out naturally as she looked at Kamijou’s face.

“But I’m not worried anymore.”

Before Kamijou could ask why, she continued.

“Basically, this problem is like the one that boy from before had. No matter how far you run, there’s no safe place. And the feelings of one person there can greatly change things. So instead of moving Mikoto-chan somewhere else, she

may be safer having someone like you by her side.”

They had arrived at the ambulance. As the legs holding up the stretcher were folded up, Kamijou felt a slight vibration in his back.

The ambulance must have been about to leave.

Misuzu must have thought so too, because she finished speaking in a hurried voice.

“In other words, if you all and people like you protect Mikoto-chan, there’s no problem.”

The stretcher Kamijou was lying on was put on the ambulance.

At first, Kamijou just listened to Misuzu ramble on, but then he frowned.

(You “all”…?)

Before he could bring that question to his lips, the ambulance’s back doors were slammed shut and the ambulance, along with its siren, started.

Epilogue: A Single Will and a Small Key.
The_Present_Target.

“Hmph.”

Hidden in the darkness, Accelerator looked over to the main entrance of the Dangai University database center and averted his gaze when he found Misuzu’s face.

There had been more Skill-Out members than he had expected remaining in the facility and taking them out had eaten up a lot of time.

But since Misuzu was fine, the person he had met in the dome must not have been her enemy. She was seeing an ambulance off, so that person must have gotten injured at some point.

“It doesn’t really matter,” concluded Accelerator as he exited the database center grounds through a back entrance.

That was when someone spoke to him.

“I had heard you were here. From the look in your face, I assume it went well.”

“Unabara,” muttered Accelerator as if he didn’t care and he looked over towards him.

The darkness didn’t suit that silky brown hair or that agreeable and youthful face. And as he approached, Accelerator began feeling *an odd pressure in his chest*.

He didn’t allow it to show on his face and casually kept his distance from Unabara.

Unabara who seemed out of place spoke to Accelerator who made the darkness his own.

“So was this another leftover job? You shouldn’t overwork yourself when you aren’t even getting paid.”

“I didn’t ask for your opinion,” Accelerator said rejecting the comment.

Looking closer, he could see Tsuchimikado Motoharu and Musujime Awaki standing near Unabara. That meant all 4 members of Group were here.

“…What do you want? Did the higher ups send you here to punish me?”

“Of course not. We’re just here to confirm a few things.” Tsuchimikado stared at Accelerator from behind his sunglasses as he spoke. “First on the list is about Misaka Misuzu. *From what I could hear at a distance*, she has decided against taking her daughter from Academy City. So her death has been called off. It may have been mainly due to some injuries, but that matter is settled.”

“Will the higher ups really accept a vague conclusion like that? That’s just what she said. She could easily change her mind at any time.”

“It’ll be accepted. …That idiot Unabara worked pretty hard in that regard.” Tsuchimikado muttered as if he was almost surprised about it.

Accelerator looked towards Unabara with a dubious expression on his face, but Unabara merely smiled in the darkness and spoke.

“Well, *that boy* was carrying out his ‘promise’ to protect the world around someone I have feelings for, so I thought I should help out some myself. It seems I overworked my shoulder a bit.”

“…Damn pretty boy. He’s been saying things like that without giving us a straight answer this whole time. He must have used a fairly unsightly method.”

Musujime brought her hand to her forehead and shook her head.

Tsuchimikado relaxed his shoulders.

“Anyway. Misaka Misuzu is fine. Good work on your first job + extras,

Accelerator. How’d you like your first Group job? Basically these jobs are cleaning up after the messes other people make, but there are plenty of ways to find them worthwhile.”

“God damn it. Today was just violence, betrayal, and killing on parade.”

Tsuchimikado nodded in response to the words Accelerator spat out.

“Exactly. But we have to protect our own weak points amongst it all. Our lives may be easier if we abandon those weak points, but we just can’t make ourselves do it… They’re our worthless treasures.”

“…”

“I have my step sister, Unabara has the person he has feelings for, Musujime has her comrades who once worked with her, and you have the clones.”

Tsuchimikado’s lips twisted up in a cynical smile.

“To protect those important things, we can’t use normal methods. The higher ups lined things up for their victory from the very beginning, but that’s basically a lie. It’s like making a rigged bet. It’s made so you can’t win and you lose your money. There’s no way to get out of here by following the rules. We can try to win by the rules anyway, we can try to find a loophole in the rules, or we can throw the chess board to the ground and go on a rampage. Those are our options.”

“Why are you telling me this? I doubt you’re suggesting we all get along and work together.”

“Because you could become a card we could use,” replied Tsuchimikado lightly. “I don’t know what they’re planning, but you seem to be quite important to the higher ups. For now, they seem content with only having messed with your electrode, but that means you have a chance. Let’s work together, Accelerator. We’ll teach you how to live in this world, so you won’t die easily.”

“…”

Accelerator looked at the other members of Group.

Tsuchimikado Motoharu, Unabara Mitsuki, Musujime Awaki.

All three of them were peculiar people and he had no idea what any of them were actually thinking. But he was the same. He would have no problem using them in order to save Last Order.

“Interesting,” he said. “But if you get in my way, I won’t hesitate to cast you aside. This only lasts as long as you have value to me. If you want anything more than that, you’re out of luck.”

“Hah. Excellent attitude.”

Tsuchimikado laughed and turned his back on Accelerator.

He waved his hand urging the others on as if he was inviting them out to karaoke.

“Come on. The higher ups are going to counterattack before long.”

The biggest restraint on Accelerator was the safety device for his electrode that the higher ups could operate remotely.

As he couldn’t use the Sisters’ substitute operations when in an area where electromagnetic waves couldn’t reach him, he had no way to block the remote safety device. Anything that would block it would block his connection with the Sisters as well.

At first glance, it seemed to be a perfect method of control, but, if he only managed to get past that, he had a good chance of escaping them.

(First I need the blueprint.)

He would go to the frog-faced doctor and get the blueprint for the choker-style electrode. I can figure out how the safety works from here. And if that takes too long, I may be able to make a second one.

(This is gonna be fun.)

A smile naturally came to his face.

From a distance, they might have looked like friends chatting as they walked along the street at night.

But Accelerator only felt something hot squirming around inside him.

There was that “man” that had talked with him on the phone right before his electrode had been cut off remotely.

He could be relaxing at his home on a couch or he could be walking around in the very same area Accelerator was. A voice over the phone could be artificially altered, so he couldn’t even be sure it had really been a man.

From what that bastard had said, there was someone behind all this.

Someone behind all this misfortune.

(Having a goal really is fun.)

In a hospital at night, the frog-faced doctor received an emergency message while making adjustments to Last Order's body. It seemed the usual boy had done something crazy again and had been brought there. He thought it was odd that the rescue worker had reported an emergency patient with a bitter smile on his face.

The virus Kihara Amata had inputted into Last Order's head on September 30th had been completely eliminated. With a bit of light rehabilitation, she would be back to her normal life.

(A virus, huh?)

Of course, getting rid of that virus wasn't enough to hinder even a part of Aleister's plan. If that was at all possible, Last Order would not have been so easily released. As usual, all the important parts had been blotted out and everything was left looking peaceful.

But it was clear that Last Order's special characteristics were being used in the plan. If he followed that line of thinking, he might be able to actually accomplish something.

The frog-faced doctor looked at the girl lying on the bed.

She physically looked around 10 years old. The girl was so small it made you think the bed had mistakenly been made too big.

"That's enough adjustments for today. I have another patient I have to work on. Just go to sleep without messing around, okay?"

The girl gave a slight nod at his words.

Then Last Order moved her lips slightly and spoke.

"Where…?"

The frog-faced doctor remained silent and listened.

“…Where is he? says Misaka as Misaka asks her question.”

That was most likely a question no one could answer. The frog-faced doctor didn’t know of course and apparently not even Accelerator’s temporary guardian, Yomikawa Aiho, or the creator of the clones, Yoshikawa Kikyou, knew where he was.

Even so, the frog-faced doctor responded.

“Soon. He’ll be back soon.”

“Yeah … Misaka misses him, says Misaka as Misaka nods.”

The frog-faced doctor said good night and left the hospital room.

He walked down a long, dark hallway to the area Kamijou Touma had been brought to.

As he did so, Last Order’s words were carved into his heart.

He was the person who would get his patients anything they needed.

Afterword

To the readers who bought each book one at a time, it's been a while.

To the readers who bought the entire series at one go, we meet for the first time.

I'm Kamachi Kazuma.

This time, it's a little different. This volume is numbered as SS. Editor-sama's request was 'write a story you can't normally write'. I wonder if I'm successful this time?

Thus, there's no key word about magic or science; it's impossible for this volume. Also, I don't know if the readers have realized that the ending of each chapter has a subtle spice to it. The hedgehog head actually using something else other than his fist, and that white guy having an intention to join a group; there's a lot of developments in the volume that didn't exist before.

The basic script is about how after the main events that happened, the scraps of information are added in to form a linear story. This is the series of 'stories that can't be written normally'. I'll be very happy if the readers can accept this lack of balance.

I'm very grateful to the illustrator Haimura-san and the editor Miki-san. It's because of your activeness that I can write this side story like another story. I'll look forward to working with you two again.

And I'll also like to thank the readers for buying this side story.

And now, this will be the end of SS.

I hope the next volume will be the main story again.

I'll put my pen down now.

-Kamachi Kazuma

Toaru Majutsu no Index — SS1

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